

A request for help to improve the coverage of the NHS and UK healthcare issues on Wikipedia

Rod Ward RGN BSc MA Ed MBCS

Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Health and Social Care, University of the West of England, Bristol

Rod@RodSpace.co.uk

Call for volunteers to add NHS content to Wikipedia.

Wikipedia <<http://en.wikipedia.org/>> is an online encyclopaedia which anyone can edit. It has been suggested that its coverage of the NHS and UK healthcare issues is currently poor. Therefore, a group of users have got together to create an 'NHS wikiproject' <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_National_Health_Service> to try to improve this. We are trying to use a range of media to reach out to others with a wide range of knowledge and skills to ask you to help. Examples of how you might do this include adding information or pictures of a hospital you know or describing (in an encyclopaedic way) an organisation you are familiar with. The idea is to improve the quality of information available to everyone and, as Google ranks Wikipedia pages very highly, get that information to a wide audience.

About Wikipedia

Since its creation in 2001, Wikipedia has rapidly grown into the largest reference Web site on the Internet, currently with over one million pages of information in the English version. The content is free, written collaboratively by people from all around the world.

Wikipedia uses a simple page layout to allow editors to concentrate on adding material rather than page design. It has robust version and reversion controls, which means that poor quality edits or vandalism can quickly and easily be reversed or brought up to an appropriate standard by any other editors, so inexperienced editors cannot accidentally do permanent harm if

they make a mistake in their editing. As there are many more editors intent upon good quality articles than any other kind, articles that are poorly edited are usually corrected rapidly.

Wikipedia's greatest strengths, weaknesses and differences arise because it is open to anyone, has a large contributor base, and articles are written by consensus according to editorial guidelines and policies. This means that it is less susceptible to retaining bias, is very hard for any group to censor, and is far more responsive to new information, but it is more easily vandalized or susceptible to unchecked information.

In 3 years, the usage of Wikipedia has grown massively, placing it in the top 20 accessed sites on the Web, which, along with the number of incoming links from other Web pages, means that it is rated highly in Google searches and is more likely to be found by any users looking for information on a particular topic.

Quality and bias

Because the articles are free to all and can be edited by anyone, there are a lot of discussions about the quality of the material. There have been studies which suggest that Wikipedia is broadly as reliable as *Encyclopaedia Britannica*;¹ however, this varies widely amongst the articles and topic areas. As with any source, it should be read with caution, but at least on Wikipedia you can do something about poor quality which is not often possible elsewhere.

All Wikipedia articles must be written from a neutral point of view (NPOV), representing views fairly and without bias. Although this is not easy, you can learn to do it. If you let your biases show, someone will fairly soon point it out to you (generally very politely), or edit whatever you have written to present a more balanced picture.²

It is also recommended practice to cite your sources with a designated referencing format. It is also considered good practice to link to other sources (books, Web sites, *etc.*) which provide further reading about the topic, but blatant advertising is banned.

Copyright and licensing

Wikipedia contributions are voluntarily given under the GNU Free Documentation License (GFDL), which applies the legal principle known as copyleft, a way of using the copyright process to prevent information being controlled by any one person, to ensure it remains freely accessible forever.³ It also means that anyone can take anything you contribute to Wikipedia and use it themselves as long as they comply with rules about citing the source and making their work freely available.

How you can help

If you are a novice user of Wikipedia, it's worth taking a look just to see what other people are writing about topics that are of interest to you, whether it's organisations such as the BMA

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Medical_Association> (a page which probably needs some editing), your professional interests (e.g. current work to improve the coverage of UK nursing <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nursing_%28United_Kingdom%29>), a hospital you know or the NPfIT <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NPfIT>>! Of course you might want to visit articles on some other interest, hobby, sport, home town, *etc.* – it's unlikely you will find a topic without an article. If you spot errors or can add

Editorial Board

- Betsy **Anagnostelis**, Librarian, Royal Free Hospital Medical Library, University College London, London
- Harry **Brown**, General Practitioner, Leeds
- Nancy **Brown**, Research Librarian, Oregon Evidence-Based Practice Resource Centre, Oregon Health & Science University, Portland, Oregon, USA
- Tim **David**, Professor of Child Health and Paediatrics, University of Manchester
- Julie **Glanville**, Information Services Manager, NHS Centre for Reviews & Dissemination, York
- Alastair **Hutchison**, Consultant in Nephrology and General Medicine, Manchester
- Robert **Kiley**, Head of Systems Strategy (Library), Wellcome Trust, London
- Carol **Lefebvre**, Information Specialist, UK Cochrane Centre, Oxford
- Joel **Newman**, PRHO, William Harvey Hospital, Ashford, Kent
- Ahmad **Risk**, GP and Chairman of British Healthcare Internet Association
- Rod **Ward**, Senior Lecturer in Health & Social Care, University of the West of England
- Richard **Wootton**, Professor of Online Health, University of Queensland, Australia
- Jeremy **Wyatt**, Professor of Health Informatics, Health Informatics Centre, University of Dundee

other useful and unbiased information, click on the edit tab and have a go. For the photographers, you can also upload photographs to illustrate the articles.

Because of the collaborative editing nature of Wikipedia, pieces can range in size. Often, providing brief information about an organisation or person can trigger off others to add to the article. It doesn't have to be a huge encyclopaedic entry initially, but a short piece that provides opportunities for others to add to it, gradually developing it into a full encyclopaedia entry.

More experienced Wikipedians may like to get involved in projects to improve the quality of whole groups of pages or help to sort categories or lists. Some users also dedicate themselves to anti-vandalism, attempting to rapidly revise spurious, deleterious edits by others.

What you get out of it

You will not get any monetary reward for your efforts; however, you will find a supportive group of people for whom collaboration is a way of working and, occasionally, grateful thanks from readers who have found your contributions useful. It is also possible that having a good entry on Wikipedia will help organisations improve their profile and public perception. The process of contributing to Wikipedia will also help individuals learn about the advantages and disadvantages of using wikis, which are increasingly being used in many organisations for collaborative/drafting work.

Wikipedia will continue to grow and you can help to influence it. The readers of this journal are likely to be amongst the most IT literate and informed and could make a really useful contribution, particularly in relation to the NHS wikiproject.

References

1. Giles J. Internet encyclopaedias go head to head. *Nature* 14 December 2005; updated on 22 December 2005 and 28 March 2006 <www.nature.com/news/2005/051212/full/438900a.html>.
2. Lipczynska S. The role of Wikipedia in higher education. *SCONUL Focus* 2005, (35): 21 <www.sconul.ac.uk/pubs_stats/newsletter/35/8.rtf>.

3. GNU Project. What is Copyleft? 3 August 2006 <www.gnu.org/copyleft/>.

For further information

The best way to find out more is to go to Wikipedia and then visit the help page <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Contents>> which includes advice on:

- *Getting started*
- *Policies and guidelines*
- *Browsing Wikipedia*
- *Communication methods*
- *Editing Wikipedia*
- *The Wikipedia community*
- *Links*
- *Resources and lists*
- *Images and media*
- *Account settings and maintenance*
- *Keeping track of changes*
- *Technical information*

There is also a helpdesk <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Help_desk> where you can ask questions and generally get a useful response fairly quickly.

Sources of information about copyright

- NHS Guidance on Copyright <www.library.nhs.uk/forlibrarians/copyright>
- LACA: Libraries and Archives Copyright Alliance <www.cilip.org.uk/professionalguidance/copyright>
- UK Patent Office <www.patent.gov.uk/copy/>
- Intellectual Property <www.intellectual-property.gov.uk/>
- Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd. (CLA) <www.cla.co.uk/>
- Changes to UK Copyright Law: a joint note from the British Library and the CLA <www.bl.uk/services/information/copyrightfaq.html#3-1>