

Study suggests doctors could add to Wikipedia

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(AP) -- Researchers are suggesting that doctors could be spending more time writing and editing Wikipedia pages on medical topics, despite questions that have been raised about the collaborative online encyclopedia's credibility.

Medical professionals should recognize that Wikipedia has become a major online source of health information for consumers, researchers wrote in the Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association.

The study was prepared by Michael R. Laurent, a medical student at Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, and Tim J. Vickers, a post-doctoral researcher at Washington University in St. Louis. Both are Wikipedia contributors.

The report measured how often Wikipedia entries showed up among the top results from main Web search engines such as Google Inc.'s when the researchers entered health-related terms. It also looked at whether people use Wikipedia more to find health information after hearing news of a disease outbreak or other health worries.

The authors found that, in 71 percent to 85 percent of search words tested at various search engines, Wikipedia came up within the first 10 results.

The study noted that Wikipedia's editing policy, which allows anyone to submit or make changes to articles, raises concerns about potential inaccuracy. That may be one reason [doctors](#) tend to stick with online outlets to which only they can contribute.

But the study said doctors, along with patient groups and associations, can help improve quality at Wikipedia by participating.

Writing for both can be helpful, said Jonathan Streeter, a San Antonio, Texas-based radiologist who runs RadiologyWiki - an editable Web site geared toward those in the radiology community.

"I think it would benefit Wikipedia for physicians to contribute articles for the purpose of the general public, but I don't think that excludes them from contributing to references that have a target audience of their own practice or specialty," said Streeter, who was not involved in the recently published study.

Jay Walsh, a spokesman for Wikipedia-operator Wikimedia Foundation, welcomed contributions from more doctors.

"We absolutely want to see more subject matter experts participating in [Wikipedia](#)," he said.

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