WEBSITE OF THE MOMENT

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If you already use the Internet every day, or even if you just want to get started, the easiest place to begin browsing is with a user-friendly guide to the best information. The daunting number of websites that you might find using a search engine (Al Shahi 2001) – and their uneven quality – has created the need for equivalents of a *Which* consumer guide. These collated sources of information are now themselves vying for our attention. So, which website should neurologists use in their quest for any type of information about the neurosciences, and set as the homepage on their browser?

Although many academic departments of neurology collate a set of useful links to other neuroscience sites on their own website, only websites dedicated to this purpose have the resources necessary to achieve this task comprehensively. The best of these is *Neurosciences on the Internet* (www.neuroguide.com/). So what does this site have to offer, and how does it match up to criteria that have been published to evaluate the quality of health related web sites (Kim *et al.* 1999)?

neurosciences on the internet

www.neuroguide.com

The website is edited by Neil A Busis, MD, who as a neurologist, previous fellow of the National Library of Medicine Medical Informatics Course, and a contemporary writer on neurology and the Internet, seems an authoritative patron of the site (Busis 1999; Busis & Honig 1999). Most websites rely on commercial sponsorship to fund their infrastructure, inevitably attracting pharmaceutical companies to medical websites, and *Neurosciences on the Internet* is no exception. When I visited the site, the two advertisements on its front page were for the Avonex Alliance and a pharmaceutical research company called NeuroInvestment. One soon learns to skip these colourful, animated messages, although their subliminal impact may not be negligible.

The structure of the site relies on pages of text connected using hypertext links (which all seemed to work), leading to a clean appearance and fast download times, but without the aesthetics of graphics and the interactivity afforded by more advanced technologies. *Neurosciences on the Internet* should be commended for providing 'mirror sites' of itself; these are local versions of the same American site, launched by friendly servers in the UK (www.genetics.gla.ac.uk/neil/), Germany and Australia to speed download times and avoid the charges levied by some academic institutions for transatlantic traffic. The site offers a fairly sophisticated search facility, enabling the use of Boolean logic in the combination of search terms, which is really necessary for a site of this size, and is expected nowadays.

However, the site is a triumph of content over design, with an array of links reflecting the wide breadth and depth of information available on the Internet. For now the site can be forgiven for mostly making occasional, short,

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subjective statements about the quality and reliability of the sites it lists – although it does list its 'Best Bets' – but as kite-marking becomes imperative, *Neurosciences on the Internet* will need to keep up. The 'Recent Additions' page provides information on the currency of the site, which inevitably appeals to regular users, although each individual page should indicate the date it was last updated so users know whether they are in a neglected region of a sprawling site. If you have any queries, or you find your department's website has been omitted, the site encourages feedback.

Neuroscience on the Internet successfully achieves its succinct mission to be, 'A searchable and browsable index of neuroscience resources available on the Internet: neurobiology, neurology, neurosurgery, psychiatry, psychology, cognitive science sites and information on human neurological diseases.' It is user-friendly and extensive, albeit with an inevitable North American bias, and it is a useful first stepping stone for a neurologist in their search for the best websites in their area of interest.

References

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