

Editorial



Lynne Harrison - joint editor



Paul Fulbrook - joint editor

Internet Connections

It has been estimated that 168 million people worldwide now have access to the internet and enthusiasm for the use of this resource is growing daily. Davies and Wenstone (1996) described the internet as 'a global coffee room', painting a picture of a place where news, views and gossip can be exchanged. Although this analogy has some merit, it seems to undervalue the role of the internet as a knowledge resource. And, whilst the worldwide web has undoubtedly revolutionised informal communication, arguably its more important impact has been to make knowledge so readily available. Quantity, diversity and immediate access to information have been key to its success, deserving of its characterisation as an (information) 'explosion'.

Nurses are amongst the many professional groups who have benefited from the internet as a resource. You only have to surf the web for a few minutes to discover a huge range of material on just about any nursing topic you can imagine. The willingness of people to share their knowledge has also been a liberating factor in the internet's success. For example, many critical care units have made their teaching programmes and protocols available for others to use. (A good example of sharing is the Notes on ICU Nursing website which is available on the CONNECT website via <http://www.connectpublishing.com/Connects/internet/links.asp>). New developments are reported every hour and – more importantly – are accessible within the same hour! However, immediate access to so much information brings with it its own challenges. For example, with regard to evidence-based practice, there is sometimes too much information to assimilate! Furthermore, the lack of regulation of information placed on the web means there is the real danger of wilful misinformation to consider. Despite these concerns, the internet is a key resource that empowers critical care nurses to develop their practice. Knowledge is power. And, when the power of knowledge is exercised in a positive way it will lead to improvements in practice that benefit the care of critically ill patients and their families.

Research has shown that nurses tend to use the internet at home, although their use of it at work lags behind that of other professional groups (Estabrooks et al 2003; Hughes et al 2003) and some studies have identified that nurses experience difficulties in accessing and using web-based information (Nolan et al 1998, Gerrish 2003). We believe that this is probably the case in many parts of the world and clearly this does present some problems. However, what is interesting note, which is particularly important in the context of CONNECT, is that major publishing houses are now beginning to realise that whereas paper-based journals are too costly for many nurses to access – especially in third world countries – many more nurses have access to a computer. Therefore on-line resources, like CONNECT, are having an impact on the web-based knowledge explosion that paper-based information has been unable to achieve. As nurses it is important that we disseminate new knowledge, information and views as quickly and widely as possible. This is obviously made much easier by the use of internet publications and indeed CONNECT was developed to allow critical care nurses throughout the world nurses to do just this.

Keeping up-to-date with the latest developments, the sharing of experiences and views are essential to improving the quality of care. We believe that the internet is an essential resource in providing access to information that supports, assists and develops nurses and nursing practice. CONNECT is dedicated to the principle of sharing practice knowledge. What is important, in this context, is that you can play your part in helping to develop critical care nurses' access to knowledge. If you have found a good website, or have a protocol or nursing innovation that you would like to share, then let us know. E-mail us at CONNECT_admin@connectpublishing.com and contribute to the information explosion that is the worldwide web!

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Editors

Paul Fulbrook (UK), fulbrook@bournemouth.ac.uk
Lynne Harrison (UK), lharrison2@uclan.ac.uk

Associate Editors

Birte Baktoft (Denmark), bba@rc.aaa.dk
Francis Loos (Canada), floos@sk.sympatico.ca
Violeta Lopez (Hong Kong), violeta@cuhk.edu.hk
Karl Øyri (Norway), karl.oyri@deltadigital.no
Ged Williams (Australia), Ged.Williams@mh.org.au

International Advisory Board

Amparo Bernat Adell (Spain), amp.bernat@wanadoo.es
Anu Isohanni (Finland), anu.isohanni@hus.fi
Aysel Badir (Turkey), abadir@ku.edu.tr
Daniel Benlahouès (France), benla@chello.fr
David Chan (Hong Kong), dchan123@netvigator.com

Dongoak Debbie Kim (South Korea), dokim@dju.ac.kr
Elio Drigo (Italy), edriigo@aniarti.it
Elizabeth Papanthassoglou (Greece), elipapa@nurs.uoa.gr
Eve Sison (Philippines), evesison2000@yahoo.com
Gordon Speed (New Zealand), speedg@wave.co.nz
Guadalupe Ibarra Castaneda (Mexico), gibarra@saludangeles.com
Lerma Hernandez (Belgium), lerma.hernandez@skynet.be
Jan Weststrate (Netherlands), j.weststrate@erasmusmc.nl
Jos Latour (Netherlands), jos.latour@planet.nl
Rósa Þórsteinsdóttir (Iceland), rosa.th@simnet.is
Sabine Ruedebusch (Germany), Sabine.Ruedebusch@pius-hospital.de
Stefan Böhm (Austria), stefan.boehm@uklibk.ac.at

Design and layout
Saeed Rashid, Saeed@bournemouth.ac.uk

Sub Editor

Anita Sommer, anita@windywillow.fsnet.co.uk

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