

SESSION III Information and the Internet**HealthWeb: Veterinary medicine - an interface to evaluated resources on the Internet**

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Keywords: veterinary medicine, HealthWeb, WWW, World Wide Web, Internet, CIC, Committee on Institutional Cooperation, Big Ten Libraries

HealthWeb at URL <http://healthweb.org/index.html/> started as a collaborative project of the CIC (Committee on Institutional Cooperation) Health Sciences Libraries Internet Working Group. The members include health sciences libraries from Indiana University, Michigan State University, Northwestern University, Ohio State University, Pennsylvania State University, Purdue University, University of Chicago, University of Illinois, University of Iowa, University of Michigan, University of Minnesota, and University of Wisconsin - Madison.

The goal is to provide an organized access to evaluated non-commercial, health-related, Internet-accessible resources. There are approximately 70 health-related subject areas in HealthWeb. The main home page resides on the server at Northwestern University. All subject pages are located on the individual institution's server.

HealthWeb is a volunteer project of the CIC health science libraries. The operations are conducted through a committee structure headed by coordinators, who are liaisons between the individual committees and the library directors. The coordinators are selected from volunteers or nominations and are approved by the directors. The role of the coordinators is to guide the development of HealthWeb, to monitor the goals of the HealthWeb committees, to review institutional commitment to HealthWeb, to facilitate decision making with the library directors, and to promote HealthWeb. There are five committees:

1. Communication
2. Content
3. Design
4. Planning
5. Technical.

Most committees have five members. The role of a committee chair is to communicate on a regular basis with the coordinators on any committee activity, progress towards goals, problems, concerns, etc., to draft goals for committee activity, to recommend actions to the directors, and to solicit participation from committee members or other volunteers.

There are four functions, which each member library will perform in their areas of excellence:

1. identify relevant Internet resources
2. evaluate the resources
3. annotate, organize and provide access to the resources via HealthWeb,
4. make new resources available on the Internet as they are evaluated and added to the pages when appropriate.

The Design Committee has developed design specification for all HealthWeb pages. There are mandated and recommended elements. The mandatory elements include:

- The directory structure on the local server must include /hw/ to allow for the search engine to work on the HealthWeb pages only
- Title tags appear in the format: HealthWeb: Subject heading: Subsection heading
- Any images used on the pages should be located on the local server not the server at Northwestern
- The footer for each page includes: E-mail address for the primary page editor; HealthWeb logo/icon link back to the main HealthWeb page; Date of last update or review (reviews should be done at least every 4 months); and the URL for the current page.

Recommended elements for the HealthWeb pages include:

- the use of tables and/or a columnar format
- postal (snail) mail address and phone number of the editor
- credentials of those who edit and critique the pages
- left justification
- use of meta tags.

It is strongly encouraged that the following are not used on the pages:

- use of frames (older versions of the browsers cannot handle frames)
- centering (which is difficult for the visually impaired to read)
- background images (white or neutral are recommended)
- other text colors than defaults (black text, blue for links, and purple for visited links).

Michigan State University Libraries is responsible for the Veterinary Medicine HealthWeb page in addition to pages in preventive medicine, minority health, osteopathic medicine, and chiropractic. The basic design of the HealthWeb: Veterinary Medicine page was developed incorporating the mandatory elements, issues of connection speed of users, and the advantage of pages not being larger than one or two screens of information. Graphics are kept to a minimum to promote speed when the page loads. A tabular format was developed for the template of the main page and the subpages. One advantage of tables in web pages is that a great deal of information can be contained on a single screen. The visitor to the page does not need to scroll through many screens to find the information they are seeking. With the links in the table, the specific information can be retrieved easily. Subsequent subpages will also have tables if warranted. For example: the page for pets will have a table allowing the visitor to select general, cats, dogs, fish, and rodents.

The subject divisions was selected based on: knowledge of the editor for what would be of value; reference questions received at the reference desk of the Veterinary Medical Center Library at Michigan State University; and availability of information on the World Wide Web (WWW) in a given subject area. The current subject divisions are:

1. Schools of veterinary medicine (divided into North America, Central/South America, Europe, Australia/New Zealand, and Asia)
2. Livestock (including equine, food animal, llamas)
3. Associations (divided by subject areas)
4. Reptiles/amphibians; (snakes, lizards, frogs/toads, turtles)
5. Veterinary libraries (same subdivisions as the schools)
6. Exotics/ avian (songbirds, raptors, exotics)
7. Educational resources (divided by subject areas)
8. Animal welfare/rights
9. Pets (general, cats, dogs, fish, and rodents).

Various search engines such as AltaVista, Yahoo, and Hotbot are used to locate potential sites on the World Wide Web. In addition to a variety of search engines, pages such as MedWeb (Emory University) at <http://www.gen.emory.edu/MEDWEB/medweb.html>, World Wide Web Virtual Library at <http://www.sol.com.sg/mirrors/wwwvl/Overview.html> and Martindale's Health Science Guide: "Virtual" Veterinary Center at <http://www-sci.lib.uci.edu/HSG/Vet.html> are also utilized to find sites. Each site was visited, evaluated, and if used, a short description written.

The HealthWeb Design Committee developed the following criteria for evaluating sites:

- What is the perceived quality of the resource?
- Is it valuable for the subject area in questions?
- Who are the producers and what is their track record?
- Is the site easy to use and retrieve information from?
- Is the site updated regularly?
- Is it a primary source or does it just point to other sites?

Additionally, the five basic criteria for evaluating print resources are used in evaluating web sites for inclusion in the HealthWeb page. These criteria are:

1. Accuracy - how reliable and error free is the information? Are there editors? Are the facts checked and verified?
2. Authority - Is the author qualified to write on this subject and who is putting up the page?
3. Objectivity - Is there minimal bias and does the information try to sway the audience's opinion?
4. Currency - Is the content up-to-date and is the publication or revision date clearly displayed?
5. Coverage - What are the topics included and are they covered in depth?

The links on the pages are checked on quarterly. At present AOLPress is the web editor of choice. This program is from American Online and is free of charge and available for several platforms: Windows 3.1, 95, and NT and Macintosh. One nice feature of the program is the built in link checker. Programs that check links still require some manual work. The link

might be down but still valid or it might take you to a page that indicates a change in the URL. It is planned in the near future to have an automated link checker that will do the work for each of the individual pages and hopefully simplify the work of the editors.

Future plans for the HealthWeb: Veterinary Medicine page call for the collaboration of the veterinary libraries in the CIC (Pennsylvania State University, Purdue University, University of Illinois, University of Minnesota, University of Wisconsin - Madison). Veterinary medicine information on the web is growing by leaps and bounds. With three other pages to maintain, it is difficult for one individual to keep current with the new sites and to monitor existing sites for changes. It is envisioned that Michigan State University would be the lead editor for the page and the other libraries would have a subject area of interest to monitor.

HealthWeb is now jointly sponsored by the CIC libraries and the Greater Midwest Region of the National Network of Libraries of Medicine (a 10 state region which includes all the CIC libraries but Pennsylvania State University). New partners from the region are being sought who would be interested in the continued development of HealthWeb and would be willing to assume responsibility for one of the remaining subject areas which include bioethics, education, immunology, occupational medicine and rural health to name a few.

The Technical Committee has been working on developing a search engine, which is now available from the main HealthWeb home page. In order to have a separate identity from any one of the institutions, the domain name: healthweb.org has been registered.