

Opinion

Do You Wiki? EyeWiki

For those of us residing on the West Coast, a trip to Hawaii is a pretty accessible way of increasing our midwinter vitamin D blood level. Many years ago, after my maiden flight to Honolulu, I encountered the airport “Wiki-Wiki” (“quick-quick” in Hawaiian-speak) bus that was smelly, hot, and anything but quick, and certainly not double-quick. Fortunately, the bus fleet eventually rusted out and was replaced by more modern conveyances.

But the word wiki lives on, as geek-speak for a website quickly assembled, edited, and corrected by multiple users. It is hard to believe that the first wiki dates only from 1995. Of course, the best-known example is the huge, comprehensive Wikipedia, but there is a multitude of others, often specializing in a specific area of knowledge.

Wikis have replaced the multivolume encyclopedia, a perfect example of what wasn't so good about the “good old days.” Probably one of the reasons I became a doctor was that my mother told me if I didn't study hard, I'd spend my life as a door-to-door encyclopedia salesman. The salesman would spread his wares on the floor and, with great subtlety, imply that any parents who deprived their child of easy access to authoritative information weren't doing enough for their offspring's education. The theory was that no matter how much guilt the parents already carried, they could always use more.

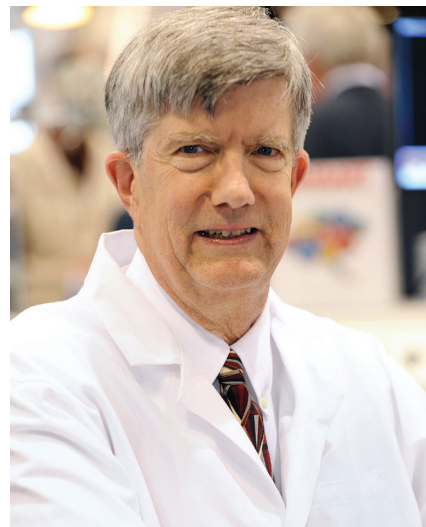
That encyclopedia business model quickly became unsustainable as information retrieval began moving online, where it was free, accessible 24/7, up to date, and did I mention free? At this point, young ophthalmologists, needing information for tomorrow's grand rounds presentation, began asking why the Academy had not sponsored a wiki of all things ophthalmologic. Championed by Ruth Williams, now the 2012 Academy president, the EyeWiki was born in 2010.

The key difference from Wikipedia and its kin is that articles on EyeWiki can be authored and edited only by ophthalmologists and ophthalmology residents. Every article is assigned to one of 10 subspecialty areas and overseen by experts in each area, thus ensuring credibility through internal peer review. Corrections and updates can also be made by users, maintaining the crowd-correcting advantages of the wiki system. Offenders who repeatedly post incorrect or biased information can be blocked from activity.

In less than two years of existence, EyeWiki has attracted more than 400 registered ophthalmologist contributors and developed 213 clinical articles and topics. More than 10,000 page edits have been made and more than 450 photos and videos have been posted since launch. January 2012 saw 14,500 visitors to EyeWiki, with almost 50 percent of visits originating from outside the United States. Much of

the success can be traced to the Young Ophthalmologists (YOs), including former YO Committee Chairman Andrew P. Doan, MD, PhD, and current EyeWiki leaders Aaron M. Miller, MD, and Brad H. Feldman, MD.

One of the most valuable aspects of the EyeWiki wasn't planned at the outset: It provides a credible source for patients wanting more than an introductory discussion of a topic. As we all experience daily, patients are having trouble differentiating online truths from half-truths. At EyeWiki, they can access (but not edit!) credible information and arrive in our chairs better informed. Go check it out yourself: eyewiki.aao.org.



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