

Articles, websites or books. Where to find the information we need?

Where should we seek information if we need to make a treatment decision? In an article, website or book? Curiously, this is not as straightforward as it may seem for most professionals, and be even more confusing for laypersons. Let us roll up our sleeves and address the issue.

Scientific articles are the most precious source of information available today. They provide the most current, up-to-date information and if we take a close look at a study design we can easily understand the place occupied by that particular study in the pyramid of evidence. In other words, equipped with some knowledge of evidence-based dentistry a reader can assess exactly to what extent a given article is relevant to clinical practice. Furthermore, articles have to prove their mettle by meeting stringent requirements before publication in a journal. Thus, information is filtered and polished prior to being delivered to the reader. A shortcoming of scientific articles lies in the fact that they target professionals, not laypersons.

Websites offer the advantage of making information accessible to laypersons. However, websites are probably the most controversial sources of knowledge. They are a mixed bag, ranging from great to lousy. They gave rise to the most famous and widely consulted doctor today: Dr. Google. This doctor arouses radically contradictory feelings. At times we are truly happy to see Dr. Google help someone to avert an inadequate treatment. On other

occasions, it provides patients with dreadful content, and we are hard put to spend a huge amount of time and saliva to explain why it is wrong. We can never warn enough that Dr. Google is not a fully reliable source of information, and professionals are advised to resort to it with caution.

The problem of information on the Internet is that websites will accept any and all information. As a result, a whole lot of ignorance is being spread on the Internet. However, there are also fantastic initiatives committed to clarification and knowledge, such as the Cochrane Collaboration,¹ a space where readers can find the most authoritative content on various health care themes. The Cochrane Collaboration has been cited as an enterprise that rivals the Human Genome Project in its potential implications for modern health treatments. This is a source for laypersons and professionals alike.

It is curious that although books have been our companions for centuries, they are still largely misunderstood by people in general. An old adage says that in order for a person to feel fully accomplished they need to plant a tree, write a book and beget offspring. Nevertheless, it takes a little browsing in a bookstore to see hundreds, perhaps thousands, of low quality books. How do we sort the wheat from the chaff in health care? It's elementary. We must understand the role books play in our particular area.

Books will passively accept information of any quality on their pages. In fact, good books comprise an author's approach to a given subject or subjects, usually based on topics they had previously addressed in scientific articles. That is, the author has published several articles. This information was tested by the scientific community and from a certain moment onward the author will consistently organize such body of information and put it into context for the readers. Often, outsiders' eyes will fail to see in these articles the alignment and consistency that is so obvious to the author, and which they expound in their book. Thus, this type of source provides a unique overview of the work carried out by someone or a group.

It is precisely due to their readability and consistency that books are often used by undergraduate students. The goal is to render

information that is more user-friendly and intuitive, and thus ideal when taking the first steps in professional training.

One great example is the book *Controversies in Orthodontics and Atlas of Tooth Movement Biology*, by Alberto Consolaro.² In his book the author rounds up the information initially presented in the form of articles, which were sieved by the dental community, thereby providing an overview of the author's amazing stances on a wide range of issues tackled in day-to-day clinical practice.

Thus, there are all sorts of scientific articles, websites and books. Make sure to choose your source wisely.

Good reading.

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Editor-in-chief

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