

Psychiatry and the Net

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The Internet opens up brand new possibilities for medicine. Nowhere before has it been possible to confer with colleagues from all over the world to swap ideas on an hour-to-hour basis on all manner of subjects.

What does the Internet really have to offer? This article aims to demystify some of the arcane terms associated with the net and defuse some of the over-enthusiastic hype that surrounds the so-called global superinformation highway.

There are three basic features of the Internet that will be of most interest to the majority of the *Psychiatric Bulletin* readers: e-mail, newsgroups, and the world-wide web.

E-mail

E-mail allows users to send electronic mail in text, graphic or binary file format almost instantaneously to any other known address in the world – all for the price of a few second's local

Table 1. Interesting World Wide Web Sites

Uniform Resource Locators (URLs)	Description of site
General	
http://www.cityscape.co.uk/users/ad88/psych.htm	Psychiatry On-Line
http://marvin.uchc.edu/	UCHC Department of Psychiatry
http://cpmcnet/columbia.edu/dept/pi/Welcome.html	New York Psychiatric Institute
http://pie.org	US Mental Health Policy
http://psych.hanover.edu/#contents	Psychological Resource List
http://matia.stanford.edu/cogsci.html	Cognitive and Psychological Sciences
http://www.med.harvard.edu/AANLIB/home.html	Whole Brain Atlas (Harvard)
http://www.cc.emory.edu/WHSC/medweb.mentalhealth.html	Mental Health Resources on the Internet
http://w3socpsy.med.rug.nl/	University of Groningen, Dept. of Social Psychiatry
http://www.lop.bpmf.ac.uk/	Institute of Psychiatry (London)
http://apsa.org/	The American Psychoanalytic Association
http://www.informatik.fh-luebeck.de/welcome.html	ICD-10 Project
Affective disorders	
http://avocado.pc.helsinki.fi/~janne/mood/mood.html	Mood Disorders
http://www.ucar.edu/pendulum	Bipolar Disorders (Pendulum Resources)
http://avocado.pc.helsinki.fi/~janne/asdfaq/	A brilliant page of questions and answers
Neurotic and other disorders	
http://uhs.bsd.uchicago.edu/uhs/topics/insomnia.html	Insomnia
http://mtech.csd.uwm.edu/~fairlite/ocd.html	Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
Substance abuse	
http://www.health.org	(US) National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information
http://www.pitt.edu/~mmv/cedar.html	(US) Center for Education and Drug Abuse Research
http://www.pitt.edu/~cedarspr/spr.html	(US) Society for Prevention Research (SPR)
http://www.cts.com:80/~habtsmrt/	HabitSmart Web
http://solar.rtd.utk.edu/~al-anon/	AL-ANON & ALATEEN
http://www.health.org/ncaditop.html	Alcohol and Drug Information
Child and adolescent psychiatry	
http://www.med.umich.edu/web/aacap	Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
http://www.seas.upenn.edu/~mengwong/add/	Attention Deficit Disorder
Forensic psychiatry	
http://ualvm.ua.edu/~jhooper	Psychiatry and the Law
Pharmacology	
http://www.fda.gov/opacom/hpnevros.html	US Food and Drug Administration

phone call. Most academic psychiatrists can get this kind of feature through their University Computing Department. Other UK psychiatrists can get Internet access through commercial resellers of space on a commercial server computer. This is provided by firms like Pipex, Ireland On-Line, and Demon. Private users need a phone line, a computer capable of running Windows (or a suitable Macintosh), and a fast modem (capable of sending more than 28 000 bauds per second) to connect the computer to the phone line. E-mail also allows you to join mailing lists like those run by, among others, the Royal College of Psychiatrists, and Interpsych – a large group (7000 psychiatrist members worldwide) of psychiatry interest groups with varying areas, from psychobiology to attachment. Once you have joined such a list a computer automatically mails you with messages from the group.

Newsgroups

There are over 4000 newsgroups on the news servers around the world. They cover topics as widely diverse as orchid growing and the Addams Family. Psychiatry and psychology enjoy about ten or twenty of these including ones on psychology research, psychobiology, and mental health in society. These groups are like forums where patients and doctors leave hundreds of messages and carry on a dialogue about psychopathology and treatments. Learning about current practice in the United States can be fascinating – meet psychologists who regularly prescribe 100 mg fluoxetine for their patients! Other support groups cater for anxiety, eating disorders, loneliness and Tourette's syndrome.

The Worldwide Web

This is perhaps the most user-friendly aspect of the Internet, but beware, not all Internet providers give you access to the Web! Check before you part with any money. To enjoy the Web in all its glory you will need a viewing program that runs under Windows or Macintosh. Suitable programs

include Mosaic and Netscape – your Internet provider should give you these.

The Web is a vast network of sites containing hypertext pages. Click on a hypertext link and you can switch in a second to a document on schizophrenia in the US, click on a hypertext link in that document and you might move automatically to another page in New Zealand. Again, all for the cost of a local phone call.

The number of psychiatry sites is growing. A list of interesting sites is given in Table 1. They are presented in URL (Uniform Resource Locator) format. Type the URL into the viewing program, press 'enter' and Mosaic or Netscape will take you to the relevant page. Most of the sites are North American, because the US has been foremost in realising the potential of the Internet.

The world's first electronic journal of psychiatry, *Psychiatry On-Line*, is based in the United Kingdom. Such nationalistic matters are, however, of no relevance in the Web. Most of its readers are American, although there is a strong following in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the UK. The journal has over 400 000 accesses a month, and the circulation is growing by 10% a month. Articles are peer reviewed electronically by a team of international referees, and in the last six months publication or rejection of papers has always been achieved within the month. Since the journal is electronic it can adopt a truly interactive style, hold international case conferences, post announcements and news within hours of submission, and elicit precise information about exactly who is reading each page. Sixty-five per cent of its readers are psychiatrists, 15% are psychologists, and the remainder are nurses, social workers, counsellors and the lay public. Features shortly to be introduced include a doctors-only section.

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