



Tools and Trends in Medical Communication

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❖ **28 Web tools for searching the biomedical literature** are detailed in a free online article in *Database* (<http://digbig.com/becfd>).

❖ **21 standards for systematic reviews** appear in a new report from the Institute of Medicine, *Finding What Works in Health Care* (<http://digbig.com/5becck>). Requested by Congress, the standards apply to systematic reviews of the comparative effectiveness of medical or surgical interventions. In addition to addressing how to select studies, synthesize the findings, and assess the quality of the evidence, the standards specify the elements of the final manuscript. They also stipulate that the manuscript should be published “in a manner that ensures free public access.”

❖ **6 free apps** of general interest to medical communicators have been released. *For the iOS platform:* MedPage Today, Medscape Mobile, the Micromedex drug reference, NEJM This Week, and PubMed Mobile. *For the Android Market:* WebMD.

❖ **4 noteworthy reporting guidelines** (guidance on writing specific types of journal articles) are out. Here are the identifiers you can type into PubMed to find them: the GRIPS statement for reporting genetic risk prediction studies (21423587); a pair of articles about economic evaluation as part of randomized controlled trials (21474510 and 21482590); and an article about reporting uncontrolled case series (21163373).

❖ **3D—sort of—models of human anatomy** are online at www.healthline.com/human-body-maps. You can rotate a male or female model and, with the click of a mouse, choose to see one of the major organ systems. Or, mouse over a body area to get a closer view and access descriptive text. Designed for an educated lay audience; should also be useful to many medical communicators.

❖ **2 innovative approaches to medical research:** (a) In an observational study of lithium for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, researchers collected information that patients had shared on the social networking site **PatientsLikeMe.com**,

then matched each patient to multiple controls (<http://digbig.com/5becja>). PatientsLikeMe openly acknowledges that it sells patient-reported data to industry, and all 4 authors of the study report are employees of the site. (b) Researchers from the RAND Corp. demonstrated that data mining—the use of a computer algorithm to search PubMed—identifies “numerous associations” between drugs and side effects (<http://digbig.com/5becjb>). Notable example: Data mining detected adverse cardiac effects of rofecoxib (Vioxx) as early as 3 years before the US Food and Drug Administration withdrew that drug. (Tip of the nib to Ed Silverman.)

❖ **1 new clinical trials registry: EudraPharm.eu** now features the EU Clinical Trials Registry, a publicly accessible version of the EudraCT database. (Eudra is the acronym for European Union Drug Regulatory Authorities.) The registry is gradually being populated with data about all pediatric trials and all phase II to IV trials in adults conducted in the European Union since May 1, 2004.

❖ **Quintiles**, a global pharmaceutical services company, has published the guidelines it developed for its employees and contractors about using social media (<http://digbig.com/5becak>). It's a great starting place for companies that are considering such a move, especially those that, like Quintiles, already have an extensive social media program. Nice touch: The guidelines were first released via Twitter.

❖ **Zero:** That's the amount of evidence for the claim that open-access journal articles are cited more often than subscription-access articles, according to a 3-year study published in *The FASEB Journal* (<http://digbig.com/5becfe>). However, in the analysis of more than 3,000 articles, the number of downloads of open-access articles was about double the number of subscription downloads. In addition, open-access articles reached about a third more unique online visitors within the first year after publication. These findings suggest to me that when helping clients choose a target journal, publication planners should ask about desired outcomes.

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