

## Book report

# Medicine and the Internet: untangling the web

Stephen Lapinsky

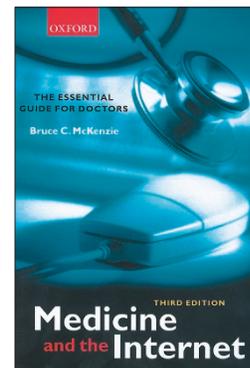
Associate Director, Intensive Care Unit, Mount Sinai Hospital, and Associate Professor of Medicine, University of Toronto, Canada

Correspondence: Stephen Lapinsky, [stephen.lapinsky@utoronto.ca](mailto:stephen.lapinsky@utoronto.ca)

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McKenzie BC (Ed): *Medicine and the Internet*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. 296 pp. ISBN 0 19 851063 2.



The Internet has ridden a rollercoaster of popularity since it became accessible to the general public in the early 1990s, from being viewed as a short-lived fad to being considered the ultimate solution to information and communication management. The Internet is clearly here to stay, and it now provides tangible support to healthcare providers in a number of roles. However, all of us, whether experienced users or novices, have felt overwhelmed, frustrated or entangled in this web. *Medicine and the Internet* is a comprehensive review of the history, technology and services of the Internet, and is a useful resource for the healthcare provider.

This book is a third edition, the previous edition being published 5 years ago. Immeasurable changes have occurred since then, and the present edition utilizes a team of expert contributors to provide clear and accurate topic reviews. The information is completely up to date and, unlike many similar publications, the provided URL (uniform resource locators)<sup>1</sup> are current and functional. The layout is easy to read, with section summaries and appropriate graphics. I found the use of information 'boxes' somewhat annoying in a few chapters, particularly when these were more prevalent than the text. The discussion is comprehensive and relevant to both the new as well as the experienced user. There are useful overviews of some technological aspects that may not interest all readers, but there is also practical advice on getting connected and using the web. The scope of the discussion is wide; sections on basic functions such as Internet service providers, e-mail,

web browsers, newsgroups, chat rooms and Internet security provide a good background for the review of medical applications of the Internet.

I found the clinical applications to be comprehensive and valuable. In fact, the discussion is far broader than the Internet, including summaries of related topics such as evidence-based medicine and medical ethics. The potential roles for the Internet in a clinical context are discussed in a task-oriented structure, and include accessing medical information, medical education, patient education, research, telemedicine, commerce and more. The emphasis is on British resources, but as a North American this opened up a vista of superb new websites to which I had not previously been exposed.

*Medicine and the Internet* is an interesting read and an excellent resource with a good mix of technology and clinical focus. Although it is not directed at the intensivist, most of the book is relevant to our practice. The book may benefit from a parallel website to allow easy access to the many web resources listed. However, a brief Internet search discovered the author's website ([www.bioneural.net](http://www.bioneural.net)) with all these links and more.

### Competing interests

None declared.

<sup>1</sup>Definition, p. 288. Uniform resource locator: a standardized syntax used on the Internet describing the location and method of accessing Internet resources. Each uniform resource locator is composed of several elements: the type of Internet service, the domain name of the host, the port address, and the path name.