Technology

Blogs for neurosurgeons

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Abstract

Blogs are useful tools to research and to disseminate information. As they allow people who do not have specific knowledge on the building of sites to post content on the internet, they turned out to be very popular. In the past years, there has been a rapid expansion of blogs on several subjects and nowadays there are over 156 million blogs online. Neurosurgery was not out of this wave, and several blogs related to it can be found on the internet. The objective of this paper is to describe, in general, the functions of a blog and to provide initial guidance for the creation and the adequate use of neurosurgical blogs. Some interesting blogs and their features are also listed as examples.

Key Words: Actualization, blog, internet, neurosurgery

INTRODUCTION

The internet has enabled a revolution in the access to scientific knowledge in the entire world.¹,⁴ However, with the enormous production of knowledge and its availability on this worldwide network, it is essential to know how to use it effectively. Several democratizing tools have been created so as to access information and particularly medical information, such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and Linkedin.⁸⁻¹¹ Such tools can make it easier for the modern neurosurgeon to stay up-to-date with the scientific literature and relevant professional information.¹³,¹⁵,¹⁶

The main objective of this paper is to describe, in general, the functions of a blog and to provide initial guidance for the creation and the adequate use of neurosurgical blogs. Some interesting blogs and their features are also listed as examples.

ABOUT BLOGS

Blog is the abbreviation of the term weblog, which was initially created with the goal of being a sort of virtual diary.¹³ Having a basic site design model, at first it was only possible to add some content and to have a pre-set layout, and that was the difference between a general website and a blog, the latter offering less variation but more ease of use. To create a blog, there is no need to know the hypertext markup language (HTML), which is used to structure texts and multimedia documents and to set up hypertext links between documents.

The focus of a blog has always been the content. Another important feature of a blog is the possibility of interacting, as users can comment on the posts, which allows them to add content as well. In the recent years, blogs have had their construction improved without losing their ease of use, creation, and access. Several tools
have been developed and have improved the layout of blogs, thus optimizing the interaction between blogs and other social networks. Due to their features, blogs are one of the tools that have maximized the revolution brought about by the internet for permitting the generation and the publication of content in a quick, simple, and easy way.

Blogs are useful tools to research for social and basic concerns and to disseminate information, always respecting the privacy regulations which are necessary for the diffusion of patient info. As they allow people who do not have specific knowledge on the building of sites to post content on the internet, they turned out to be very popular. In the past years, there has been a rapid expansion of blogs on several subjects and nowadays there are over 156 million blogs online.[2] Neurosurgery was not out of this wave, and several blogs related to it can be found on the internet. In Table 1, we list some blogs suggestions, adding one blog that belongs to the authors and other blogs that we commonly use and judge to be interest, but it is a personal opinion.

An initial step to use blogs as a professional updating tool is to know the main blogs that deal with neurosurgery, as blogs linked to recognized neurosurgery journals or blogs more visited, with known members, longer working time, and the impact factor of the journals cited. In order to be informed about the updates of a blog, one can register for its “feed,” which is a tool that triggers the automatic sending of recent reports of new content to one’s personal e-mail address ever since the registration has been made [Figure 1]. Many specialized blogs organize and select abstracts of the major neurosurgical publications.[8] Sometimes, the authors of the blogs select contents of articles and make them available to the users, thus enabling the users to make their own comments.

For users and authors it is important to remember that there are several limitations on privacy and copyright that still not very well established, as this is a very new area. Although difficult, it is important to monitor everything published in your blog to control inappropriate subjects that may violate patient’s identity or some copyright. One should have some tools to help in this security, like word tracks, to alert to inappropriate comments.

**BLOGS AND SOCIAL NETWORKS**

Facebook, nowadays with around 800 million users around the world, is a revolution in communication among people, allowing multiple users to connect and exchange information.[12] Initially seen as a way to connect with friends, it proved to be an important network tool to share scientific information as well. Blogs have their pages on Facebook (either as personal profiles or as public profiles, also known as Fan Pages, meant to promote specific brands, products, websites, organizations, and so on) where their updates are daily published. This way, in addition to the “feed,” Facebook also allows one to track the updates of a blog with a different layout and sometimes more attractive to some users.

| Subject                                | Blog                                        | Twitter               |
|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Neurosurgery                           | www.neurocirurgiabr.com                    | @neurocirurgiabr      |
| Neurosurgery                           | www.neurosurgic.com                        | @NEUROSURGICcom       |
| Surgical Neurology International (journal) | http://surgicalneurologyinternational.com/blog/ | @SNInt               |
| Neurosurgery (journal)                  | http://neurosurgerycns.wordpress.com/      | @NeurosurgeryCNS      |
| Neurosurgical apps and decision support | http://DigitalNeurosurgeon.com             | @DigNeurosurgeon      |
Twitter, created in 2006, already has 100 million active users, and is a sort of microblog which allows that a content of up to 140 characters be shared. It is possible to “follow” twitter content (called “tweets”) related to neurosurgery, with the same purpose of following a blog. Besides, some blogs also have their own tweets and, by following them, one can access their latest posts.

**HOW TO CREATE YOUR OWN BLOG?**

Before building a blog, one should have in mind its main subject and target public, besides trying to choose a matter that is part of one’s routine and to which new information, beyond what is already available on the web, can be added. It would be useful to search the chosen topic on the internet beforehand, so as to know what can already be found.

One should try to answer three basic questions before beginning a blog:
1. What is my goal with a blog?
2. Which subject will my blog be about?
3. Who is my target audience?

Some tools are available to help to create a blog, and two of the best known are: www.blogger.com and www.wordpress.com [Figures 2 and 3]. The process of creating a blog is very simple. And those tools, Blogger and Wordpress, are self-explanatory. A topic should be chosen (layout) and the content completed. Later on, the posts are simply added [Figure 4]. There are several sites that teach how to make a blog step by step. We suggest wikihow (http://www.wikihow.com/Start-a-Blog).

The interesting point is to turn the construction of a blog into a frequent process of learning and studying, and so the blog should regularly be updated with interesting content. One must keep in mind that creating a blog is very easy but the hardest part is to continue it and to make it interesting.

**THE CREATION OF THE BLOG “NEUROCIRURGIA BRASIL”**

The blog “Neurocirurgia Brasil” was created by the author JLBP and came up from the interest in continued updating with the latest articles related to neurosurgery. The scientific content of the blog is selected with the aid of the Really Simple Syndication (RSS), a web feed for publications which allows to receive all the updates from the registered publications by e-mail. By carefully selecting the major neurosurgical publications (which is done by selecting papers from journals with higher impact factors), a hundred weekly updates are received and, in order to make it easier for the followers of the blog, the articles selected are daily posted in the form of abstracts on “Neurocirurgia Brasil.” If the reader wants to access the original article, he/she is directed to the publication in which it was released. This way, the reader is properly informed and updated and the copyright of the publications is kept. Thus, the screening of scientific articles related to neurosurgery is the primary goal of the blog “Neurocirurgia Brasil”.

Other issues concerning the routine of a neurosurgeon, which are less frequently covered in scientific journals, are also available. Examples are the use of virtual tools and new technologies (i.e. the iPad, the iPhone, smartphones in general and tablets) for the learning process. Some of these resources are particularly worth
mentioning: NeuroMind, a smartphone program that provides neurological scales and decision support; Professor Rhoton’s lessons about neuroanatomy; classes from the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) about neurosurgery; “How I do it” sessions, with videos of surgeries performed by worldwide known neurosurgeons; and so on. Such examples give an idea of how informative those tools can be, but they also serve the purpose of showing how difficult it can be to find them in case one is not so familiar with web browsing.

Another very interesting possibility to be considered when creating a blog, as mentioned before, is to link it with other social networks, as for instance Twitter and Facebook. In the case of “Neurocirurgia Brasil,” the links are, respectively, @neurocirurgiabr and Neurocirurgia Brasil, which reach much of its target public.

By working the way briefly described above, “Neurocirurgia Brasil” has been trying to progress in order to help with the daily updating of neurosurgeons.
SUGGESTIONS OF BLOGS

“Neurocirurgia Brasil” is one of the blogs that frequently post the main abstracts from publications related to neurosurgery and neurology through the website www.neurocirurgiabr.com in which summaries of several articles are available.

The blog “Neurosurgic.com” (accessed at http://www.neurosurgic.com) provides a network of information about neurosurgery, including neurosurgery videos, articles, discussion groups, and calendars of the main courses in the area.

The blog “Neurosurgery,” besides displaying all the articles of the journal Neurosurgery, to which it is related, offers other interesting information such as videos, and is available at http://neurosurgerycns.wordpress.com/.

The blog of the publication Surgical Neurology International can be found at http://surgicalneurologyinternational.com/blog/, bringing several neurosurgery updates and clinical cases. Another interesting feature of this blog are the updates of neurosurgery related applications for mobilephones. More information about mobile apps can be found at the blog on http://DigitalNeurosurgeon.com.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Blogs are important tools to update and to spread content related to neurosurgery, allowing the creation and an almost immediate dissemination of information on the internet. The employment of user-friendly tools made blogs become a revolution in the broadcasting of several subjects. Therefore, it is a good idea for a neurosurgeon, who intends to be a continuously updated professional, to be familiar with the handling of blogs because without a doubt, they are a unique way of contemporary scientific communication.

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