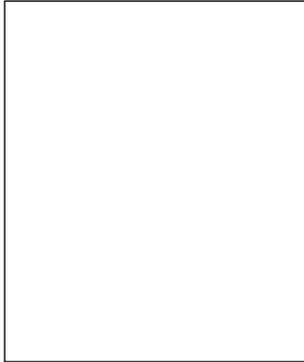


Our unconscious voyage towards techno-dependency



Maggie Watkinson
Editor

Until my telephone line failed during the recent gales I did not realise how important the Internet had become in my working life. The frustrations of being without access to the net at home were enormous and made me aware, perhaps for the first time, how dependent I have become on modern technology.

Like many others I use the net to find up-to-date information, do literature searches (gone are the days of having to get to the academic library), and communicate with others. Suddenly having this facility withdrawn has caused delays in my communication, difficulties in acquiring information that I need, and a sense of being in limbo – I am concerned that I might miss something important (the publication of the *National Service Framework for Diabetes* perhaps!).

Diabetes on the web

More and more people with diabetes are using the net as well. It is now a fairly common occurrence that individuals I see in the clinic tell me about something they have read on the net. I am also more likely to suggest accessing the web as a source of information about diabetes, particularly to younger people. I suspect that this is true of most of us.

Current shortcomings

So, it seems that the Internet has become, almost insidiously, an invaluable tool in diabetes care. However, there are some issues of concern. For instance, many of the currently available diabetes websites have 'professional only' sections for which one needs a password to enter, and that are presumably not available to the general public. I wonder what information these 'professional' sections contain that is deemed unsuitable for general consumption? In the climate of trying to ensure that people with diabetes have improved access to the information they require to manage their own diabetes, this seems somewhat contradictory. On a more personal note, I find it impossible to remember so many

passwords and, despite writing them down, almost invariably lose them among other papers!

Computer access

Another difficulty is access to the Internet. Of course, one needs a computer with the necessary hardware to connect to the web. I am sure there are still some diabetes nurses with inadequate provision of computers or Internet access, although this situation should improve with the government's commitment to information technology.

Making time

There is also the issue of time. I find it difficult to find the time at work to 'surf' the web; I can usually make time to find something specific but in these circumstances usually know what I am looking for and have a precise goal. Discussions with colleagues lead me to believe this is not unusual. Most of us who use the web for gathering more vague information probably do so at home in our own time.

Setting up diabetes websites

Making time to use the net in a creative fashion is likely to be even more difficult. The article by Mhairi Meldrum and Heather Reed on pp.165–7 of this issue describes the development of their diabetes website. One can only imagine the investment in time needed to develop this exciting initiative, let alone that needed to maintain it. Indeed, without the support of industry for funding and website design, the project might not have come to fruition. The development of a diabetes website that is local, freely accessible to all and regularly updated is an achievement to be applauded, given the constraints we currently work with.

I predict that more diabetes units in the future, and probably Primary Care Trusts too, will wish to develop their own websites in a similar way to the Yorkshire model. It is to be hoped that the necessary investment in hardware and skills development to help diabetes teams achieve their goals will occur. ■

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