

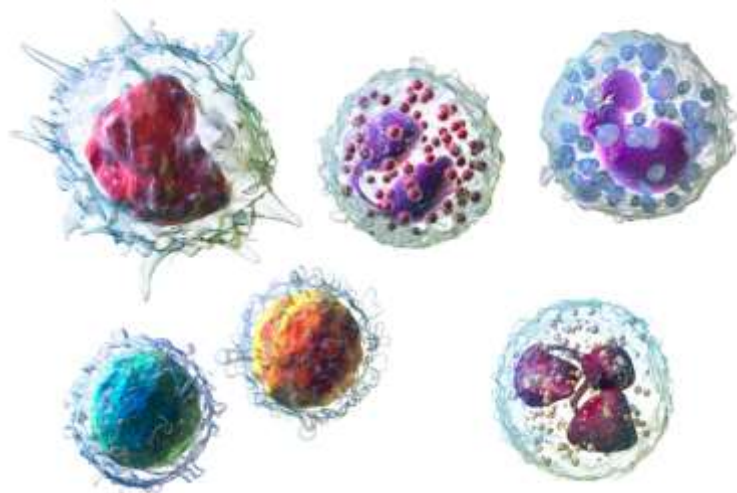
Press release

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A roadmap for improving Wikipedia

The evolution of Wikipedia's medical content: past, present and future

Shafee T, Masukume G, Kipersztok L, Das D, Häggström M, Heilman J. (2017)
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Wikipedia is a key
source of public
health information

Wikipedia needs
expert input

Health
professionals need
Wikipedia's reach

Image: Blausen medical CC BY-SA, via *WikiJournal of Medicine* ([full res version](#)) doi:[10.15347/wjm/2014.010](#).

Given its prominence as a source of scientific and medical information, improving Wikipedia is a public health necessity. How can the medical and scientific community work towards enhancing the quality and quantity of its medical articles? An international group of doctors and researchers have outlined their recommendations in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*.

“Wikipedia has over 44 million articles across 295 languages and climbing, but contributor numbers are pretty flat.”

The encyclopedia's content, community and collaborations have changed a lot over the last 16 years. Now is also the time to plan improvements for its future. The Wikimedia Foundation, the charity that supports Wikipedia, is currently updating their strategy through to 2030. It's therefore an ideal opportunity for those with an interest in disseminating biomedical information to become involved in Wikipedia. The authors identify four main areas that can be used to improve the encyclopedia.

“At 16 years old, Wikipedia is a teenager, and going through some changes.”

Individual

Wikipedia is built entirely by volunteers. It's therefore important for Wikipedia to attract contributors from diverse backgrounds and expertise. This requires making the community as welcoming as possible to newcomers, as well as concerted recruitment efforts for underrepresented groups, such as women. Building up the community is a prerequisite for building up the content.

20%

“Did you know Wikipedia still only has 20% of writers who are women?”

Societal

Similarly, in order to attract expert contributors, Wikipedia editing needs to be seen as a valuable use of time for busy professionals. Academic opinion of Wikipedia is already improving, however contribution needs to be formally recognised by professional bodies in order to reward contributors. Several medical schools already incorporate editing into their courses, and academic journals are beginning to experiment with dual-publishing with Wikipedia. As communities of experts put greater emphasis on keeping the general public informed, they will need to take a greater role in shaping the world's most read encyclopedia.

Physical

Reducing the technical challenges in editing the encyclopedia is key to successful growth of its medical content. This includes basic improvements to the editing interface, as well as features that help editors write more efficiently. Some simple formatting tasks are already semi-automated, so assistance from more sophisticated artificial intelligent systems could help improve readability, find relevant content, and suggest information in need of translation. What's more, this technology will have to adapt to the worldwide trend of mobile devices becoming the main way of getting online.

Organisational

Wikipedia's policies have been written by the same process as its articles - the collective efforts of its community. Unfortunately, they've expanded over time into an intimidating mass. Newcomers will find starting out easier if policies are simplified and introduced more gradually. Several successful models also now exist for entire organisations to collaborate to help improve Wikipedia. Such collaborations give extra reach to the partner organisation and provide high-quality content to the encyclopedia.

Wikipedia's reach makes it a vital health information resource. The recommendations made in the scientific report will hopefully guide further development and growth.

“Making sure the encyclopedia continues to improve requires simultaneous efforts on multiple fronts.”

The take-home message to biomedical and health practitioners: There has never been a better time to engage with Wikipedia. Please visit [Wikipedia.org/wiki/WP:MED](https://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/WP:MED) to get involved.

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