

## Chapter XIV

# Electronic Information Sources for Women's Health Knowledge for Professionals

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In an age where health professionals lead very busy working lives, electronic information sources provide ease of access to vast amounts of health information on an unprecedented scale. Health professionals have the ability to access the information they require from a location convenient to them and can do so at any time, day or night. This convenience has resulted in an increasing reliance upon electronic sources of information amongst women's health professionals. As technologies develop, both the importance placed on the electronic dissemination of information by women's health professionals and the use of such resources will increase dramatically. This chapter outlines the different sources of electronic information available to women's health professionals, the constantly evolving online accessibility issues, the importance of critical appraisal when assessing the validity of online resources, and the role of the information specialist in the health sector. As this topic is currently under-researched a number of future research directions are also proposed.*

### **INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND**

Electronic information sources can be defined as sources of information that are held in a digital or electronic format that can be accessed, searched or retrieved either by an electronic network or by an electronic data processing application. These

sources can take the form of, for example, a search engine, a bibliographic database, a downloadable PDF file, an electronic journal, an e-book or a podcast.

With health professionals leading very busy working lives electronic information sources provide ease of access to vast amounts of health

information on an unprecedented scale. Health professionals have the ability to access the information they require from a location convenient to them without the need to visit the library or a professional organisation in person. Electronic information can be sought and delivered to health professionals quickly and at any time, day or night. The convenience of electronic information provision therefore has encouraged health professionals to utilise this method of obtaining health information and has resulted in an increasing reliance on electronic sources of information amongst women's health professionals. As technologies develop and electronic dissemination of information increases the importance placed on the electronic delivery of information to busy women's health professionals will increase dramatically.

A comprehensive literature search carried out to identify other research in this area has revealed that in fact very little has been written specifically about electronic sources of information for women's health professionals. In this context this chapter will discuss the different sources of electronic information available to women's health professionals, online accessibility issues, the importance of critical appraisal and the role of the information specialist in the health sector.

## **ELECTRONIC INFORMATION SOURCES FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH KNOWLEDGE FOR PROFESSIONALS**

The development of the internet can be said to have revolutionised the way in which health information is delivered to clinicians around the world. As both access to and use of the internet continues to increase, the availability of internet-based knowledge sources for health professionals has soared. The development of the internet has allowed access to information on an unprecedented scale. Information on a vast array of health topics is available on the internet and delivered to the

user very quickly, easily and most importantly on a 24/7 basis. Accessed at a location convenient to the user and at a time that is suitable, the internet is an increasingly popular platform for the delivery of health information resources.

With the explosion in the use of the internet, many organisations providing health information resources to professionals identified the need to provide their resources also on the internet and to expand the services they provided where internet technology would allow them to offer additional services that they may not have traditionally been able to provide. In particular, the field of women's health has witnessed an enormous growth in the availability of electronic resources covering all aspects of women's health and aimed at all practitioners involved in the care of women. The wide variety of different health professionals working in women's health has allowed for different knowledge sources to be developed or expanded ensuring that all professionals including, for example, consultant obstetricians, consultant gynecologists, midwives, general practitioners and gynecological nurses, have access to the information they require to make health-related decisions.

The format of on-line information resources available to women's health professionals varies enormously. Women's health electronic information is available from web-based libraries, from e-journals and even through blogs and podcasts. The wide ranging formats used to provide information to women's health professionals ensure that information covering every aspect of the health of women is available and is in a format that is desirable and useful to most professionals. However, the range of electronic information sources available also raises a problem regarding the varying quality of sources of women's health information. It is important to recognise that not all electronic resources available on the internet are from a reliable, evidence-based source. It is vital therefore to ensure that the electronic information being accessed by women's health

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