

Judge: Web sites for Health

The **Judge** Project developed guidelines for judging the quality of health information Web sites. Two sets of guidelines were produced: (i) to help health consumers make informed choices about Web sites, and (ii) to assist support groups to produce good quality Web sites. These guidelines were made freely available as a purpose-designed Web site from February 2003 to February 2009. The content of this web site was then made available for download from the University website as Word or PDF documents (<http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/sd/academic/ceis/re/isrc/themes/ibarea/jud/>). The project also resulted in a number of published journal articles.

Judge was developed in partnership between Sue Childs at the School of Computing, Engineering and Information Sciences, Northumbria University and a member of Contact a Family, a charitable organisation which provides support, advice and information for families with disabled children (<http://www.cafamily.org.uk>). The project was supported by the Health Foundation and ran from 2002 to 2003. The Project Team comprised Sue Childs, a member of Contact a Family and a researcher at Northumbria University. A Steering Group advised the project; its members were from six charities in the health and health information fields. Reporting comprised internal progress reports and a final end-of-project report to the Health Foundation.

The guidelines that were developed are based on the views of health consumers and support groups. The research was carried out by Sue Childs and consisted of six stages:

1. Collecting background information, by a review of the literature on quality issues and health information on the Internet.
2. Obtaining health consumers' views on quality issues and concerns about health information on the Internet and any help they needed, by (i) a postal questionnaire survey of health consumers and (ii) focus groups with health consumers and support group members and workers.
 - The participants were family or support group members associated with Contact a Family. All contact was through Contact a Family; Northumbria University held no personal details.
 - Postal questionnaire. Questionnaires were anonymous. Data from the paper questionnaires were transferred to an Excel spreadsheet for basic numerical analysis.
 - Focus groups were audio recorded, transcribed to Word documents, and the transcripts anonymised. Analysis involved identification and synthesis of themes. Consent forms were obtained (signed paper documents).
 - Data and records were kept secure on password controlled computers / in locked filing cabinets as applicable. They were retained/disposed of according to Northumbria University's policy. Only Sue Childs saw the full data. Only a summary of the synthesised data was shared with the rest of the project team and the Steering Group. No data was placed in the public domain.
3. Writing the guidelines, by using the information gained from the first two stages.
4. Piloting the guidelines, by making them available as a basic Web site: individual health consumers (i.e. members of Northumbria University staff) and support group workers (via Contact a Family) then used the guidelines with the researcher and fed back their views.
5. Developing a Web site to disseminate the guidelines, by designing a simple, accessible, usable Web site, testing the site against a wide range of accessibility guidelines and setting up a free-access site with its own domain name.
6. Publicising the Web site, by sending details to a wide range of organisations, officially launching the guidelines with press releases and submitting the Web site to search engines and gateways.