
The library without walls: images, medical dictionaries, atlases, medical encyclopedias free on web

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The aim of this article was to present the “reference room” of the Internet, a real library without walls. The reader will find medical encyclopedias, dictionaries, atlases, e-books, images, and will also learn something useful about the use and reuse of images in a text and in a web site, according to the copyright law.

KEY WORDS: Internet - Libraries, Digital - Research.

Sometimes, in preparing lectures or lessons you could look for a brief definition, an image, something to support your words. Or you just have a curiosity, or a need of quick information on a medical subject. Yesterday you would have gone to the reference room of a library and consult a heavy volume of an encyclopedia; today you can access a lot of free and qualified literature on the web, the real library without walls.

Let's spend a word about the complex copyright question. Finding an image or a text on the Web does not necessarily mean that it is free to use. Most images on the Web are under copyright, unless otherwise stated (e.g. the Creative Commons licenses, which allow the reuse saving the attribution. But it is the author who states them).¹ Linking to images or texts is always permitted. It is strictly forbidden to copy and paste an image or a text without the explicit permission of the rightful owner.

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Medical encyclopedias

Medical Encyclopedia

A medical encyclopedia (<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/encyclopedia.html>) is hosted by Medline Plus, the US National Library of Medicine gateway to trusted health information. It is an illustrated medical encyclopedia which includes over 4 000 articles about diseases, tests, symptoms, injuries, and surgery. It is also available in Spanish. It is easy to access and to navigate, and offers for each term images (free to get and reuse), a short definition, information about causes, symptoms, exams and test, treatments and so on (Figure 1). Each voice is edited by a specialist whose name and affiliation can be found at the end of the page. It is regularly updated – a guarantee of quality.

Medical Encyclopedia Index

The Medical Encyclopedia Index (http://www.umm.edu/ency/index/eng_index.htm) is edited by the US University of Maryland, is searchable by disease, symptom, injury, surgery, special topics and is available also in Spanish. For some terms it also offers images free to get and reuse; for each voice there is a short definition, a description of symptoms, treatment, and prevention.

If one is just looking for a definition, one can also use the PubMed MeSH, Medical Subject Headings



Figure 1.—Medline Plus Medical Encyclopedia for “Spinal stenosis”.

(<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/entrez?db=mesh>), which provides about 24 767 descriptors. Moreover, one can also visit Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page) whose medical voices are very accurate and always up-to-date and, in the spirit of social networking, verified by thousand of readers in the world.

Medical dictionaries

Merriam-Webster Medical Dictionary

The Merriam-Webster Medical Dictionary is accessible from its own general homepage (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/>) by flagging “medical” before searching or, with a simpler and more direct interface, from the cited Medline Plus (<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/medlineplusdictionary.html>). You can type the word you have to find, or just begin it,

followed by an asterisk (to truncate and get all the terms with this root).

CancerWeb Online Medical Dictionary

The CancerWeb Online Medical Dictionary (<http://cancerweb.ncl.ac.uk/omd/>) includes over 46000 terms relating to biochemistry, cell biology, chemistry, medicine, molecular biology, physics, plant biology, radiobiology, science and technology. Searchable not only by words but also by subject area, sometimes it gives, besides the definition, cross-references and links to related resources on the web.

Multilingual Glossary of technical and popular medical terms

The Multilingual Glossary of technical and popular medical terms (<http://users.ugent.be/~rvdstich/>)



Figure 2.—HONMedia Osteoarthritis images.

eugloss/welcome.html) is a project commissioned by the European Union and developed by the University of Ghent (Belgium). You can find 1 830 technical and popular medical terms in eight of the nine official European languages: English, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Danish. The system contains:

- 1) lists of technical and popular medical terms: index of all the medical terms, with cross-references between technical and popular terms (one list for each language);
- 2) glossaries of technical and popular medical terms: notes and comments from translators and users for each of the 1830 terms in the selected language;
- 3) Multilingual lemma collection: this list contains 1 830 pages, one for each of the 1 830 concepts in this system. All the technical and popular terms from the all languages are brought together on each page;

4) dictionary: this list contains a short description (in English) of each term.

You can approach this system by “Speed Search”, just typing a word, or by browsing the alphabetical list once selected a language, or by accessing the multilingual “Lemma collection” for the translation.

Wordreference.com

For general purposes, Wordreference.com (<http://wordreference.com/>) is a service with free online dictionaries (English, French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese) for translations and cross-search. ON each voice a “listening button” is provided with English or American correct pronunciation.

Dictionaries and thesauri

The University of San Diego (California, USA) provides a list of Dictionaries and thesauri (<http://>

tinyurl.com/3qdbkf) for general and specialist purposes, including acronyms and symbols.

Atlases, e-books, open courses

Visible Human Project

The Visible Human Project (http://www.nlm.nih.gov/research/visible/visible_human.html) is the project of the US National Institutes of Health aimed at the creation of complete, anatomically detailed, three-dimensional representations of the normal male and female human bodies. From the homepage lot of material is available for free (on the contrary, the files of the whole images are for charge).

Golden Hour

A source of quality for atlases is the Israeli web site Golden Hour (http://www.goldenhour.co.il/on_line_atlases.html), that lists several anatomy atlases (among which the famous “Gray”), but also a useful “The Muscle dissector”, and an “Atlas of brain”. A rich section of “Radiology files” is also presented.

Musculoskeletal Radiology

Musculoskeletal Radiology (<http://www.rad.washington.edu/academics/academic-sections/msk>) is the subject of a medical gateway edited by the University of Washington (USA) School of Medicine. This is a very rich site, with a muscle atlas and a lot of teaching material for diagnostic radiology.

MRI and radiology teaching files

MRI and radiology teaching files (<http://www.mritutor.org/mriteach/index.html>), edited by professor Ballinger of the University of Florida, presents a lot of images divided by body location (spine, musculoskeletal, brain...), searchable by diagnosis or unknown cases. All the images are under copyright.

There are also lots of sites providing free access to e-books.

Bookshelf

Bookshelf – US National Library of Medicine is accessible from the PubMed homepage by the black

navigation toolbar on the upper side of the screen – Books-, or directly at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/entrez?db=books&itool=toolbar>. The interface is the same and well known as PubMed. You can type a word in the search box and the system gives back all the references it found in all the chapters of the available books (about one hundred). From PubMed itself, in many abstracts, there are link on the upper right to “Related articles” and “Books” if the case.

Virtual books

Virtual books. – Golden Hour (http://www.goldenhour.co.il/virtual_books.html): a list of about 40 texts, including the Merck manuals and a useful Textbook of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (<http://www.emedicine.com/pmr/index.shtml>).

e-Medicine

e-Medicine (<http://www.emedicine.com/>) is a comprehensive site that offers e-books divided into specialities and also a useful link to free accredited CME courses.

Free books 4 Doctors

Free books 4 Doctors (<http://www.freebooks4doctors.com/index.htm>) provides access to about 630 e-books, accessible by title or by speciality (search is not allowed, only browsing).

Books online

Books online. – National Academies Press (<http://www.nap.edu/topics.php?browse=1>) gives access to more than 3700 free books in lots of disciplines, among which Health and Medicine or Biology and Life Sciences.

The last initiative to report is the Boston Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) OpenCourseWare (<http://ocw.mit.edu/OcwWeb/web/courses/courses/index.htm>): it is a web-based publication of virtually all MIT course content. Some of the courses have also video content. Sections to be seen: Biology, Biological Engineering, Brian and cognitive sciences, Health and technologies.

Medical images

If you need a medical image – beware of the copyright law, not all of the sites listed below are free – you can have a look at different websites.

HONMedia

HONMedia (<http://www.hon.ch/HONmedia/>) is a repository of over 6 800 medical images and videos, pertaining to 1 700 topics and themes, edited by the Health on the Net Foundation. Search by keyword or by steps (category, subcategory, voice, like in Figure 2: Diseases – Musculoskeletal diseases – Osteoarthropathy, Primary Hypertrophic). Please notice that under each image there is the indication of the copyright owner, to whom requests of reuse must be addressed.

Medical Images - TRIP

Medical Images - TRIP Turning Research into Practice. The EBM search engine (<http://www.trip-database.com/index.html?categoryid=7>) has a section dedicated to the images. Searchable by keyword.

Medical Images

Medical Images edited by the Swedish Karolinska Institutet (<http://www.mic.ki.se/MEDIMAGES.html>) is a fundamental index with links to hundreds of websites in several disciplines that provide access to medical images. Only browsing admitted. A disclaimer about copyright can be read on the top of the page.

Martindale's Health Science Guide

Martindale's Health Science Guide (<http://www.martindalecenter.com/HSGuide.html>) offers more than 4 800 images and about 1 000 videos in its disciplinary sections. In some cases are listed also atlases and textbooks.

Google images

Google images (<http://images.google.it/>) offers a good response for medical images. From the Advanced search page it is possible to limit e.g. for domain (.edu, .org ...) to obtain quality material.

References

1. Creative Commons. Available from <http://creativecommons.org/>