

The internet

Don't slip through the net

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JNNP could help you become a technophile

It is possible to thrive in the modern world without recourse to the internet. But only just. If you are a “technophobe”, deterred by the daunting size and complexity of this continually evolving medium, *JNNP* could help you become a “technophile”.

Fewer than four decades ago, the cold war motivated the creation of the internet. Academic inspiration subsequently harnessed the internet's potential in its two best-known components: email and the world wide web. Born of a need for communication and maturing through a hunger for information, these two human desires have made the internet indispensable.

The overwhelming size of the internet makes it a formidable repository of knowledge. The figure below shows the Internet Software Consortium's latest internet domain survey (www.isc.org), which estimates that there are >160 million “hosts” and that their greatest proliferation has occurred in the last four years.

It is, of course, impossible to know how many people use the internet, but an educated guess is that ~580 million

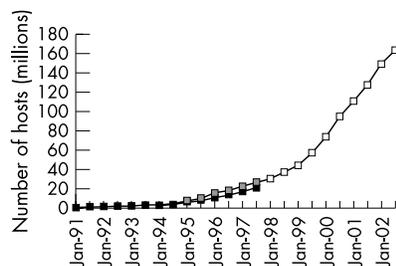


Figure 1 Internet domain survey host count. Reproduced with permission.

people across the world (almost 10% of the global population) were online in May 2002 (www.nua.com). Health is probably the largest single category of information hosted by the world wide web, and over two thirds of the online public—known as “cyberchondriacs”—seek information about it.¹

Despite its impact, the internet is still flawed. Access in the developing world remains limited, but initiatives like Digital Island seek to broaden the availability of material—such as *JNNP*—and make the world a smaller place.² While freedom to publish is part of the essence of the world wide web, cultural constraints will preclude consensus about what constitutes appropriate censorship.³ The notorious excess of poor quality information—largely due to lack of regulation and commercial exploitation—has become enough of a priority for the *BMJ* to devote its 9 March 2002 (*Evaluating the quality of health information on the internet*) theme issue to it. A recent survey is cause for some optimism; almost half of the “cyberchondriacs” in the USA and France were found to visit medical journals and academic or research institutions, closely followed by commercial health web sites.¹ Furthermore, the entire contents of two online evidence based health resources (*Clinical Evidence* and the Cochrane Library) were made available to the public in September 2002 through the National Electronic Library for Health (www.nelh.nhs.uk).

So how can *JNNP* help you cope with this immortal yet imperfect (but improving) medium?

Since 15 March 1999 the full text of the *Journal* has been available at

www.jnnp.com,⁴ as have customised @lerts, collected resources, and emailed tables of contents, with free back issues, rapid responses, and electronic manuscript submission via Bench>Press introduced recently. In this issue, the first of a series of review articles deals with the internet itself.⁵ Subsequent articles will focus on resources for neurology (including neurophysiology and neuroradiology), neurosurgery (including neuropathology), and psychiatry (including neuropsychiatry). Every review will be free at www.jnnp.com, and the recommended web sites are available as downloadable Bookmarks/Favorites at <http://jnnp.bmjournals.com/misc/bookmarks.shtml>. If you are already a “technophile”, or if we succeed in converting you, join us in our attempt to keep pace with the internet in the monthly *Neuroline* filler section.⁶

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