A Review of Medscape

Alissa V. Fial
Marquette University, alissa.fial@marquette.edu

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Alissa V. Fial, MA, MLIS
Research & Instruction Services
Associate Librarian
Raynor Memorial Libraries
Marquette University

Content

Medscape, which is owned by WebMD, was launched in 1995.¹ The web portal has a wide range of audiences including healthcare professionals and consumers. Membership is free for individuals, and a variety of audiences is represented. The website has content available in multiple languages: English, German, Spanish, French, and Portuguese.²

The content is divided into professional and consumer health areas and includes:

- News and Perspective
- Drugs and Diseases
- CME and Education
- Academy
- Video
- Decision Point

The News and Perspective section covers current breaking medical news, including conferences and expert commentary. A section is also devoted to the business of healthcare (e.g., payment, healthcare reform, malpractice issues, EHRs). The editorial content partners with reputable organizations, including CDC, FDA, and American College of Cardiology.³

The Drugs and Diseases section is intended for healthcare professionals and covers conditions, procedures, and anatomy. Updated content includes guidelines as well as case studies, quizzes, and simulation tools. Drug-related information includes calculators, drug interactions, and pill identifiers. Content is also linked to MEDLINE.⁴

The CME section includes over 30 specialties, ranging from allergy and clinical immunology to surgery, family medicine, nephrology, OB-GYN, psychiatry, and radiology. Content is also provided related to other health professions, including nurses, pharmacists, and interprofessionals. Individuals can track their CME through their membership.²
The Academy focuses on business and offers on-demand courses related to business for physicians. The Video section includes programs and educational content, including testimonials from physicians and their patients.3

Finally, there is the Decision Point section, which includes clinical guidelines and focuses on 10 major areas: cardiology, dermatology, diabetes and endocrinology, HIV/AIDS, neurology, oncology, psychiatry, pulmonology, rheumatology, and critical care. The content is available in video format, and provides answers by experts in the related areas.5

With its extensive amount of material, it is clear Medscape is intended for a vast audience, including medical doctors and other health personnel, consumers, librarians, and educators. The content is selected and vetted by a wide-ranging editorial group. There are editors for the major networks, including professional, business, and features, as well as journalists and editors for the range of medical specialties.6

Medscape reports on its extensive editorial decision-making on its policies page.7 This is of note, since Medscape is owned by WebMD, and the content is developed independently of advertising content on WebMD. This resource categorizes its policies by area. Also of note, News and Perspective has content written by journalists, but they do not write on a topic if they have any financial ties. Other areas, including Drugs and Diseases, consult with physicians to ensure the quality of the content.

Features/Functionality

Medscape, like most search engines, allows primary and advanced searching of its content. Basic features allow for a search of a topic, and results will appear. Advanced searching is done through the different areas of content (e.g., News, CME, Decision Point).

The interface is straightforward with limited options. With such a vast range of content, it would be similar to running a search in any other search engine. Once a search is run, it interacts with the federated content across the Medscape platform. Refining results can occur through the following major areas: News and Perspective, Drugs and Diseases, CME and Education, or MEDLINE. Further refining is possible by relevance or publication date, time, specialties, or content. Time refers to date ranges from the past year, month, week, day, or anytime. There are over 30 specialties. Finally, content is of varying levels from news to journal articles, procedures, visual content including Medscape TV or slideshows, and practice guidelines.

With the MEDLINE option, results will link to NLM and be viewed on the PubMed platform. Content cannot be exported to citation programs. However, most of it appears to help track CME or other training. Healthcare professionals are most likely using the content for vetted and quick access to information.
The strength of Medscape is its depth of content, in particular, the ability for health personnel to access material, keep up to date on topics, track CME, and consult with a community of users. In addition to the web interface, there is an app available for iOS and Android in the Apple and Google Play stores. Again, since most of the content appears to be quick and accessible, the use of an app will ease the process. Individuals also may sign up for a newsletter.

Another strength is the CME and Education content. It is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME), the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE), and the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC).

Related to its strength is a potential weakness – the depth of content. The categories are large and expansive. Users may need to take the time to explore Medscape to determine which area to focus their time and attention on (e.g., continuing education, drug calculators). Once that is done, the interface is easy and user-friendly.

**Business Model**

Medscape is free. The recommendation for individual users is to sign up for membership. Membership will ease CME and other activity tracking for health professionals.

Libraries, hospitals, and academic medical centers can all access the material. Librarians may be interested in including Medscape on their resource guides (e.g., LibGuides via Springshare) to direct patrons to it.

**Breakthrough**

Medscape offers a depth and breadth of content available for healthcare professionals as well as consumers. Its extensive coverage across multiple areas can provide a more profound search experience for its users. Since it is a free resource, it is recommended that libraries explore and encourage their patrons to use it.

**References:**

