# Evaluation of Health Science Websites

Due to revolution in information and communication technology, the Internet has now become important source of health information both for consumers and for providers of health information. Everything is now available on the click of a button. However, in order to make informed decisions regarding health, the available information should be reliable and accurate. On the Internet, due to freedom of information, anyone can create a website and offer expert advice regarding a host of topics. Research has shown that most contents on health information websites are not authored by medical professionals and not policed by any governing body or adhered to any ethical regulations. Studies have shown that the quality of most of the available health information on World Wide Web is not reliable. Therefore, there is a risk that health information available may be misleading or dangerous. Such information of dubious quality can do more harm than good. This necessitates the evaluation of health science websites based on some criteria.

The major criteria using which we have to evaluate health information websites are given below.

1. **Audience**

The site must specify its purpose, mission and scope. It should say whether the information provided is for consumers or for health practitioners. In other words, it should state its intended audience.

1. **Accessibility and Presentation**

The site must be prepared at a level that is useful to the intended audience. , i.e. it must be comprehensible. Also easy accessibility must be ensured by logically organizing the contents with site index or table of contents. The text, graphics, animation etc. must be user-friendly and the need of plug-ins must be avoided as much as possible. In the same way, acceptance of cookies for accessing the contents must be avoided and the contents must be freely made available to the users. If possible, the site must enable a local search engine.

1. **Navigation**

Navigation means the directions for using the site. It reflects the support provided to the user when moving in and around the site. Elements of navigation include: easiness of moving around, easiness in understanding site structure, and availability and validity of links. For instance, increasing the number of site links does not necessarily contribute to adding value to the site.

1. **Currency**

The field of health sciences is very dynamic and constantly changing in nature. For example, researchers continue to learn new things about various diseases and their treatments. The users should know whether the health-related information that they are reading is up-to-date. Many Web pages will post the date on which the page was last reviewed or updated. This will be usually found at the very bottom of the page. The following are the specific criteria related to the currency of health information website:

1. When the site was first created?
2. How frequently or often is the site/site content updated?
3. Does the site indicate when it was last updated?
4. Does the site indicate date until which the content/information is valid?
5. **Active Hyperlinks**

The hyperlinks on the site should be working. Dead links indicate a poorly maintained site. Also, external links to poor quality sites weaken the pages credibility. A health information site should provide hyperlinks to other relevant and related sites in the area including the websites of related organizations.

1. **Authorship**

The name of the individual or organization creating the site should be clearly stated on the website. The site should list the credentials of the author, whether it be an individual or an organization. Normally, the information about the authorship will be provided on the home page under the heading ‘About Us’. The site should provide a way for users to contact the author and to make comments or ask questions.

The health-related websites published by the government agencies (gov.), nonprofit organizations (.org) and educational institutions (.edu) are more reliable than the websites of commercial organizations and individuals (.com). The sites with .com web addresses may represent a specific company or be published by a company that uses the Web to sell products or services. These are called commercial sites. Commercial sites can offer useful and accurate information. However, you may want to be more careful about believing the information you read on these sites. The information may not be fair and accurate if the company that pays for the site has something to gain from it. It's a good idea to double-check information you read on commercial websites.

In the same way, a website published by an individual (also named after ‘.com’) may offer support and advice about coping with certain medical / health conditions and their treatments. These sites can contain reliable and useful information. However, it's very important to double-check the information that we see on a website published by an individual. While many of these sites contain good information, some may contain myths or rumors.

1. **Objectivity**

Objective information is the information that represents all points of view and free from bias. A good site will be fair, balanced, and objective.

1. **Accuracy/ Completeness of Information / Coverage**

The information provided on the website must be complete in every respect. It should avoid “under-construction” pages as much as possible. Also, there should not be any factual inaccuracies, spelling mistakes, or grammatical errors and the information should be well organized.

1. **Contact Details**

The authorized contact details must be prominently displayed on the site. The contact details may include phone numbers, fax, e-mail ids etc.

1. **Facility for Feedback**

The site must have a facility for taking feedback from the consumers, including registration of complaints and compliments.

1. **Safeguards**

The health information websites must display terms and conditions of use of the website, if any in order to avail the services offered through the website. Also it should indicate the users’ rights.

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# Evaluation of the Website of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association

The American Speech–Language–Hearing Association (ASHA) is a professional association for speech–language pathologists, audiologists, and speech, language, and hearing scientists in the United States and across the world. ASHA currently represents nearly 2 lakhs audiologists; speech-language pathologists (SLPs); speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students in communication sciences and disorders.

**ASHA Website**

The official website of the association is available at [www.asha.org](http://www.asha.org). The major highlights and features of the site are discussed below.

1. **Information for Audiologists/ Speech-Language Pathologists, Faculty and Students**

The home page of the sites provides separate resource pages for the audiologists, speech-language pathologists, faculty and students in the field of Communication Science and Disorders (CDS).

The resources for the audiologists and speech-language pathologists include practice management information, access tothe practice portal**,** publications**,** [Inter-professional education/practice](http://www.asha.org/Practice/Interprofessional-Education-Practice/)information**,** facility for connecting to the professional colleagues, and ASHA certification Information.

 The students are provided with information on careers in communication sciences and disorders (CSD) that can be pursued such as audiologist, speech-language pathologist, and speech, language, and hearing scientist.

The information for the faculty include academic program accreditation, CSD education survey, academic program resources, higher education news, curriculum resources, academic & clinical instruction, faculty resources.

Bottom of Form

1. **Information for the Public**

With the aim of ensuring that all people with speech, language, and hearing disorders receive services to help them communicate effectively, the site provides a section by name, ‘Information for the Public’. The section provides a lot of resources that help people to understand communication and communication disorders.

1. **Identify the Signs**

Speech, language, and hearing disorders are treatable and early detection is a major contributor to speedier recoveries, shortened treatment periods, and reduced costs for individuals and society. **Identify the Signs** Section on the site aims to educate the public about the warning signs of communication disorder, if necessary, seek professional help; and share information with family, friends, and social networks.

1. **ASHA Store**

The ASHA Store facilitates online purchase of a variety of products such as clinical resources, books, compact discs and webinar based CEU courses for audiologists and speech-language pathologists, and various consumer education products on communication disorders.

1. **Career**

The Career Section provides opportunities for the job seekers to search for job and employers to post job notifications. Also, the section gives career development information and information for the students on Communication Science and Disorders (CSD) profession.

1. **ASHA Wire**

[ASHA Wire](http://pubs.asha.org/) is the part of the website that provides access to the publications of ASHA which include the following:

**Peer-reviewed Scientific Journals**: ASHA publishes four peer-reviewed scientific journals namely, American Journal of Audiology, American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research, Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools

**ASHA Leader:** This is a monthly newsmagazine for and about audiologists, speech-language pathologists, and speech, language and hearing scientists.

**Perspective Series of Publications**: The ASHA features 19 Special Interest Groups (SIGs) professional communities focused on advancing research and professional practice in communication sciences and disorders. The research findings of these 19 Special Interest Groups were being published serially as 19 perspectives publications. From April, 2017 ASHA started publishing a new all-in-one *Perspectives of the ASHA Special Interest Groups* by combining all the 19 individual perspective publications.

**Clinical Research Education Library (CREd**): The CREd Library is the newest addition to ASHA Wire which hosts a dynamic collection of resources on topics critical to the conduct and advancement of high-quality clinical practice research in the communication sciences and disorders (CSD) domain.

1. **ASHA's Practice Portal**

ASHA's Practice Portaloffers one-stop access to resources to guide evidence-based decision-making on clinical and professional issues. The goal of ASHA's Practice Portal is to assist audiologists and speech-language pathologists by providing the best available evidence and expertise in patient care, identifying resources vetted for relevance and credibility, and increasing practice efficiency.

1. **Continuing Education**

A section of the site provides information on various continuing education resources on communication science and disorders. It includes live events and self-study courses by ASHA.

1. **Research**

The Research section includes Evidence Maps, a searchable online tool designed to assist clinicians with making evidence-based decisions on communication disorders, tools and resources on Evidence-Based Practice and ASHA Survey Research and Reports.

# Events

The events section provides the details of various events and conferences taking place under the leadership of ASHA.

# Certification

The Certification Section provides information about ASHA Certification

1. **Other facilities on the site**

**Member login facility and Member Center**: There is an exclusive member area on the site for the members of ASHA access to which is restricted using Username and password.

**Search Facility**: The site is having a powerful search facility with basic and advanced search facilities covering the entire site content as well as its sections.

# Evaluation of the Website of the Rehabilitation Council of India

[Please visit the RCI website and prepare the note as done above]