

# Online blogging during conferences: an innovative way of e-learning

## Need for e-learning

New tools such as blogs, social media networks, and audio and video podcasts in Web 2.0 have allowed better exchange of information among physicians across distances. The medical world has started embracing this new technology as it emerges. Many top-rated medical journals have a blogging section of their website. As nephrologists, there is a growing need for us to adapt to these tools for e-learning, because nephrology is a constantly changing field. Blogs are interactive websites that consist of regular diary-like entries. Unlike traditional Web pages, blogs are dynamic and permit the writers (bloggers) to engage in 'one-to-many' conversations with readers.<sup>1</sup>

Because blogs engage people in knowledge sharing, reflection, and debate, they often attract a large and dedicated readership. They can also engender small virtual groupings of individuals interested in co-constructing knowledge around a common topic within a community of practice. One study showed that more than 90% of medical students in the United Kingdom were using social networking sites and blogs as part of their daily lives.<sup>1</sup> Medical educators have begun to recognize the potential of social media at the undergraduate, graduate, and fellowship levels of training.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the currently available 3G generation of mobile phones equipped with megapixel cameras can

instantly post high-resolution clinical photos to a worldwide audience.<sup>1,2</sup> The nephrology community has embraced blogging, as is evident by the number of blogs that have been created in the past five years (Table 1).

Nowhere is blogging more useful than at mainstream nephrology, dialysis, and transplantation scientific meetings.<sup>3</sup> Physician-bloggers share important points of each meeting with their audience and help disseminate the most recent concepts and paradigms in nephrology to the larger community. The few blogs that did this in the year 2010 were Nephrology On-Demand (<http://www.nephrologyondemand.org>), Nephron Power (<http://www.nephronpower.com>), and the Online Transplant Center (<http://www.onlinetransplantcenter.blogspot.com>).

## Experiences

The authors of Nephron Power and the Online Transplant Center did online blogging of a few sessions of the 2010 National Kidney Foundation and American Transplant Congress meetings, respectively. Short teaching-oriented blog entries were posted on topics presented at the conferences to share with the fellows and physicians who could not make it to the conference that year. The types of entries that appear on these sites may depend on the interest of the blogger, and certain topics might be ignored.

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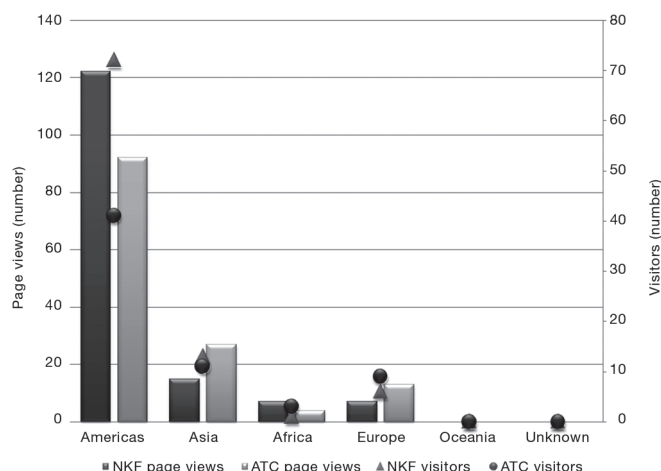
**Table 1 | A few popular nephrology blogs and websites**

### Physician- and patient-run nephrology blog sites

The Renal Fellow Network, endorsed by the American Society of Nephrology and the International Society of Nephrology (<http://renalfellow.blogspot.com/>)  
Uremic Frost (<http://www.uremicfrost.com/>)  
Nephron Power (<http://www.nephronpower.com>)  
The Online Transplant Center (<http://www.onlinetransplantcenter.blogspot.com>)  
Pediatric-Nephrology.com (<https://www.pediatric-nephrology.com/>)  
Precious Bodily Fluids (<http://www.pbfluids.com/>)  
Dialysis from the Sharp End of the Needle ([http://www.billpeckham.com/from\\_the\\_sharp\\_end\\_of\\_the/](http://www.billpeckham.com/from_the_sharp_end_of_the/))  
History of Nephrology (<http://historyofnephrology.blogspot.com/>)

### University-based nephrology blog sites

Nephrology On-Demand, Division of Nephrology and Hypertension, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina, USA ([www.nephrologyondemand.org](http://www.nephrologyondemand.org))  
UKidney, Internet School of Nephrology, Toronto, Canada; endorsed by the American Society of Nephrology and the International Society of Nephrology ([www.ukidney.com](http://www.ukidney.com))



**Figure 1 | National Kidney Foundation and American Transplant Congress blog on Nephrology On-Demand.** National Kidney Foundation (NKF) blogging data from 14 April to 1 July 2010 (<http://blog.ecu.edu/sites/nephrologyondemand/?p=3323>); American Transplant Congress (ATC) blogging data from 3 May to 1 July 2010 (<http://blog.ecu.edu/sites/nephrologyondemand/?p=3634>).

Nephrology On-Demand (ISSN 2155-9813) is an online educational initiative by the Division of Nephrology and Hypertension at East Carolina University. Physician- and nurse-bloggers were asked to blog about scientific sessions conducted during the 2010 National Kidney Foundation and American Transplant Congress meetings. Each blog had an independent comment section for users to discuss, critique, and question the bloggers' reports. The National Kidney Foundation blog registered 137 page views from 79 individuals (up to 23 June 2010), with 18% coming from outside the Americas. A similar trend was also found for the American Transplant Congress blog (132 page views, 61 individuals, 32% from outside the Americas) (Figure 1).

#### Other fields in medicine

Not many medical fields have adapted to perform online blogging of conferences. Video and audio podcasts are available via many institution and journal websites, but live online blogging has not made it to many medical fields. A neurology blog (<http://neuropsychological.blogspot.com/>) and a psychiatry blog (<http://www.psychiatrictimes.com/conferences>) were among the few that we discovered with live coverage of medical conferences. A podiatry blog had live updates for conferences as well (<http://aspma.wordpress.com/>). Clearly, there is a lot of room for this to grow and blossom into a way of passing on content presented at medical conferences.

#### Concerns

As new technologies take over, new concerns arise. Readers of these blogs have to assume that the information is secondary and might be filled with bias or perhaps minor inaccuracies. A reporter for a newspaper usually obtains a press pass from the press office, which usually grants permission to report on anything presented at a meeting or presentation. Blogging has no such rules as yet. It seems to us that when researchers present findings to colleagues at a meeting, they should not object to somebody blogging about them. If you go to a lecture and take notes and then share those notes with your fellow student or co-fellow, that is considered sharing of knowledge. We believe that blogging is sharing of ideas. Blogging is the virtual equivalent of having a spoken conversation and should not be forbidden. PowerPoint presentations, videotaping, and audiotaping of actual conference material should be strictly prohibited and is a copyright infringement without the permission of the presenter. Another concern is that most bloggers might get distracted from the live conference if they are busy blogging. This can be true, but a report may be considered 'live' even if it is written 5 or 10 minutes after the talk has been completed. This way the blogger does not miss the essentials of the talk. Scientists do have some real concerns about their work being displayed inaccurately, but most online media have some forum for posting corrections and clarifications, and most scientist-bloggers would respond quickly and appropriately to direct e-mails adjusting the errors. If anything, this is simply a good argument that scientists should engage more with online media. The presenters of conferences might even consider being part of the blogging experience to get feedback and improve the accuracy of the data presented. In France, the National Board of Physicians has developed ethical guidelines for websites that are devoted to health issues, and specifically for physician-authored content.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps, a similar mandated review by the American Medical Association and possibly even the American Society of Nephrology, National Kidney Foundation, or International Society of Nephrology might make the websites more standardized and accurate.

#### Future directions

Wikis, blogs, and podcasts carry the potential of complementing, improving, and adding new collaborative dimensions to the health education currently in existence. There is a need for

pediatric and adult nephrologists to adopt the new Web 2.0 technologies, by disseminating conference talks in the form of live blogging.<sup>3</sup> Cautious and ethical use of YouTube video and SlideShare PowerPoint presentations might hold promise for disseminating conference information in the near future.

**DISCLOSURE**

The authors declared no competing interests.

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