

# Traveling the information highway

## Medical Web services

with Bob Alden



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*Information about IEEE's information highway is available electronically. To find out what is available, view the Web page at "www.ieee.org/eleccomm/" or send a message to "fileserv@ieee.org" and place the file name "info.email" by itself at the start of the first line in the message.*

**PUBLIC SERVICE.** These sites provide information and often rely upon corporate financial support and advertising income. America's Doctor at "www.americasdoctor.com" provides information in a variety of ways, while explicitly stating that the information obtained via their Web site does not constitute "medical practice." It is possible to communicate with a doctor on-line, join a live chat session on a posted topic, view transcripts of previous sessions, join so-called communities (based on broad categories of diseases), and link to the Web sites of selected hospitals.

One can also order, using on-line credit card payment, a variety of medically related products.

I thought it was interesting that the disclaimer file seems to be the longest document in the entire Web site.

A recent newspaper article (The Toronto Star) notes the interest in this site by quoting the usage as 500,000 visitors each month which is met by a staff of about a hundred physicians. Physician's Guide to the Internet at "www.webcom.com/pgi/" provides information related to

the practice of medicine for anyone.

**Pharmaceutical Information Network** at "pharminfo.com/pin\_hp.html" provides information for both physicians and patients about drugs, medical books, and so on.

**WebMD** at "www.WebMD.com" has two sections. One is a Health and Wellness Center providing information for the general public. While it does not provide on-line communication with physicians it does provide answers to selected questions. The other section is a fee-for-service resource for healthcare professionals. Topics include business management, communications services, supplies ordering, and so on.

**FEE-FOR-SERVICE.** CyberDocs at "www.cyberdocs.com" is on the Web to sell products and services. You can buy medications on-line and consultations with physicians. The only information available is to impress you with the credentials of the staff and to speed those paid-for products to you. By the way, their version of a disclaimer file states that they expect all their customers to seek appropriate medical follow-up with another physician in an office- or hospital-based setting. They also indicate that certain classes of drugs such as narcotics are not appropriate for on-line prescription.

**RELATED SITES.** The Web contains a large number of sites for health-related issues and information. Here are a few that I have found and put on my own Web site under the heading "World in General." They are an indicator of what is available. You can find more by using a search engine like Yahoo at "www.yahoo.com" and clicking on "Health."

**World Health Organization** at "www.who.ch"  
**Food and Nutrition Information** (U.S. Agriculture Department) at "www.nal.usda.gov/fnic"

**U.S. National Library of Medicine** at "www.nlm.nih.gov"  
**Canadian Medical Libraries** at "www.mun.ca/lists/canmedlib"

**Center for Disease Control** at "www.cdc.gov/cdc.html"  
**American Diabetes Association** at "www.diabetes.org"  
**Canadian Diabetes Association** at "www.diabetes.ca"  
**Juvenile Diabetes Foundation** at "www.jdfcure.org"

**Healthfinder** at "www.healthfinder.org"  
**APPLICATION TO ENGINEERING.** Public Service. There is certainly scope for public service information. The general public has many concerns and questions that could be answered over the Web. These range from the economic and environmental impact of electric power generating stations and transmission systems, to signal access difficulties with cell phones, or compatibility within computer systems.

**Fee-for-Service.** Physicians tend to serve individuals on a one-to-one basis whereas engineers tend to provide infrastructure services to utilities, corporations, and government. However the trend is for engineers to increasingly offer services on a contractual basis, project by project, instead of being full-time employees. Does this suggest that these engineers could benefit by promoting themselves on the Web, as individuals or in consulting teams?

**THE IEEE CONNECTION.** Perhaps direct participation by IEEE members in offering Web-based services, at both the Section/Chapter and the Society level could benefit us as individuals and as a profession. Our IEEE connection could provide quality assurance for the service we offer as well as an opportunity to publicize and promote our Institute.

Why not think about your area of expertise and how you might participate — as an individual, within your company, or as part of an IEEE entity? These medical sites offer us some examples of the range of services, the mix of free information, fees for services, and product sales, as well as different ways to fund the activity, and the need for disclaimers.

Robert T.H. (Bob) Alden is the IEEE Electronic Communications Advisor, and a former IEEE vice president. In his other life, he is the past and founding director of the Power Research Laboratory at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ont., Canada. He welcomes your input via e-mail at "r.alden@ieee.org". His home page is "http://power.eng.mcmaster.ca/alden".

*Bob Alden's August column was published with several errors, through no fault of his own. A correct version appears on THE INSTITUTE Web site at "http://www.spectrum.ieee.org/INST/aug99/inf\_hwy.html". We apologize for any confusion this may have caused.*



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- Canadian Medical Libraries** at [www.mun.ca/lists/canmedlib](http://www.mun.ca/lists/canmedlib)
- Center for Disease Control** at [www.cdc.gov/cdc.html](http://www.cdc.gov/cdc.html)
- American Diabetes Association** at [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)
- Canadian Diabetes Association** at [www.diabetes.ca](http://www.diabetes.ca)
- Juvenile Diabetes Foundation** at [www.jdfcure.org](http://www.jdfcure.org)

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# Getting the most from your IEEE membership

## Pakistani member discovers universal value of IEEE volunteer work

FASID AHMED MASOUD SINDHU  
Secretary, IEEE Karachi Section

Last November I was able to share some of

The opportunity for IEEE volunteer work has enriched my professional life with recognition and learning experiences that you just can't find in the classroom. I'd like to share some of those experiences with you,

article if even one or two more members are encouraged to participate in their section's activities then I will really be honored. I already have received e-mails of appreciation from members for my first telling of my

### LET US KNOW

We welcome your comments and ideas on how to get the most from your IEEE membership. Send them to IEEE Membership Development, 445 Hoes Lane, Box 1331, Piscataway, NJ, USA 08855-1331; fax 732-463-3657; or e-mail [themost@ieee.org](mailto:themost@ieee.org).