



Date: October 30, 2004
To: Participant
From: Peter Goldschmidt, President
Re: Evaluating/formulating criteria for rating health-oriented websites

Thank you for your interest in evaluating/formulating criteria for rating health-oriented websites.

1. On receipt, please complete and fax back this page; keep it to transmit evaluations.
 - Please complete the enclosed Health Website Criteria Evaluation Workbook by Nov. 15.
2. Fax your evaluations to 443-320-0026; retain all materials until we have acknowledged safe receipt of your evaluations; then, destroy them.

We are unable to offer an honorarium for completing the Evaluation Workbook. However, qualified participants who complete it will be preferred as website raters. We are planning to offer an honorarium for rating health websites. If you have any questions, please call Jennifer Mo at 301-816-2875 or send an email to jmo@has.com.

1. On receipt of the Evaluation Workbook, please complete and fax this page to 443-320-0026

Name: _____
Title: _____
Company: _____
Address: _____

Tel: _____
Fax: _____
Email: _____

Please check all that apply:

- I have received the Evaluation Workbook and I am planning to complete it by the deadline
- I can complete the Evaluation Workbook, but I'll need until (date) _____
- Sorry, I can't complete the Evaluation Workbook.
- Please inform the following people about the availability of the Evaluation Workbook
(Provide contact information below or attach sheets)

Requests/remarks:

2. After completing the Evaluation Workbook, please fax completed pages to 443-320-0026
Only fax back completed or marked up pages

- I am faxing this cover page and _____ Workbook pages

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Health Website Criteria Evaluation Workbook

Evaluating/formulating criteria for rating health-oriented websites

Contents of workbook

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Purpose of program

In January 2003 Health Improvement Institute (Institute) began a research program (program) conducted collaboratively with Consumer WebWatch (CWW). The purpose of this program is to enable consumers to become more informed users of health websites. The program's objectives include the following:

- To improve disclosures made by Web site publishers
- To enable consumers to be more effective Web site users
- To provide consumers with independent evaluations and ratings of Web sites.

Program Phases

The program consists of a number of phases, to culminate in independent ratings of health websites. The Institute has completed *Phase I* of the program. In *Phase-I*, we:

- Searched for previous evaluations of health websites
- Identified 22 criteria sets within the project's scope
 - Described criteria used or suggested for use in evaluating health websites
 - Evaluated the consumer-friendliness of identified criteria sets.

To describe criteria in sets within the projects scope, we developed a set of meta-criteria. To evaluate the utility and consumer-friendliness of identified criteria sets we developed a basic set of evaluation criteria.



Analysis of criteria and evaluations of criteria sets for assessing the “reliability” or “credibility” of health websites indicated that there are none that are readily usable by consumers. Moreover, there are none that are readily usable by professionals to assess reliably health websites. Hence, the objectives of the program include to develop a consumer-friendly health website rating tool, to rate health websites and to display ratings for use by consumers.

In next phases, we will:

- Develop a user-friendly website rating tool.
- Rate health websites using panels of health professionals (who will apply the rating tool being developed here).
- Evaluate the utility to consumers of health website ratings.

Conceptual approach

For purposes of conducting the program, Health Improvement Institute has identified the following types of health websites:

- Health communication websites (to communicate health information to consumers, health professionals, or other specified groups of individuals)
- Behavior modification websites (to support individuals who want to modify their behavior, eg, stop smoking, loose weight, exercise regularly)
- On-line product sites, including pharmacies and health stores
- Health care organization websites.

Further, the Institute has subdivided health communication websites into to the following subtypes:

- Health information website (to communicate descriptions and data to inform decisions regarding a person's or population's health or health care, including interventions to promote health and wellness and to prevent or to manage disease or its effects and treatment's side-effects, including prevention strategies, diagnostic test, all sorts of treatments, and rehabilitative regimens. It may be intended for health professionals or for consumers. Health information is a broad term, and includes news of developments as well as such substantive information as treatments for diseases. It does not include any of the following types of health communication websites
- Health ratings websites (to communicate to consumers, health professionals, or other specified groups of individuals information on the performance of health care providers, the quality of health websites, etc)
- Health resource website (to provide access to such health-oriented resources as journal articles and books)
- Health advice on-line (to provide on-line answers to health questions and/or support); includes "chat rooms."

The focus of this workbook is on "health information websites" (as described above). Its purpose is to develop criteria for evaluating this type of health-oriented website. Some websites may consist of or contain various of the above types or subtypes. Some evaluation criteria may be common to one or more types or unique to a single type. In the future, the Institute may elaborate criteria for additional types of health-oriented websites. To provide feedback on criteria for evaluating health websites, please see Part 3. For an expanded typology of health websites, and to provide feedback on the taxonomy, please see Part 4: of this evaluation workbook.

When consumers search for health information websites, they face the following 3 problems:

- Accessibility — includes
 - Finding a website that contains the information for which they are searching — this is a problem of Internet search engines and is not considered further here
 - Finding information on the discovered website, and the structure of that information which affects its accessibility to the user
 - Comprehending the information once found on the website
- Relevance — a judgment that the consumer who discovers the website must make. However, the website may provide consumers with clues to help to decide if what they have found is relevant to their purpose
- Validity, i.e., the reliability or scientific soundness of information, includes
 - Currency — when the website (a webpage or web-piece) was last updated/edited
 - Structure — eg, credentials of authors
 - Process — eg, editorial policy/process, in such terms as
 - Search for relevant information
 - Compilation of identified information/writing
 - QA/peer review/fact checking
 - Substantiation of "facts" by specific reference to the published literature or other sources
 - Outcome — the reliability of the information for the intended purpose, including
 - Completeness — context for use of information
 - Comprehensiveness — no omission of important relevant facts
 - Accuracy of what is stated, including
 - Objectivity of presentation
 - If the information pertains to a controversial topic (where science is silent, evidence conflicts, and/or opinions of qualified experts disagree), the controversy is surfaced and discussed appropriately
 - Important facts are supported by pertinent references to the medical literature or other appropriate sources
 - Material is coherent; not contradictory
 - Organization and presentation of material is clear; not muddled, including no superfluous or extraneous material (so that the consumer may become confused and draws the wrong conclusion from the material).

To comment on this conceptual approach (to accountability, relevance, and validity), see Part 5.

Essentially, websites are an alternative source of information for consumers. With respect to their quality, the following 3 aspects are of interest. Website:

- Transparency or accountability— a test that all websites should pass
- Editorial (or technical) adequacy — a test that all health websites defined as "health information sites" should pass
- Information reliability — a test that "reliable" health information should pass (including that displayed on a website).

To comment on the 3 aspects of health website quality, see Part 6.

This phase of the program is concerned only with the first 2 aspects of health website quality; the third is common to any published or communicated health information (and is not a special characteristic of



health websites on which such information may be displayed). The routine assessment of the reliability or validity of health information displayed on a website (the completeness and accuracy of what is stated) is impractical:

- A website may contain information on many health topics; it would be necessary to rate the validity of statements about each one
- To rate the validity of health information requires a panel of qualified medical experts; there might be considerable disagreement among experts
- Ultimately, assessments of the reliability of health information reflects the state of medical science.

Assessment of website accountability and adequacy are important in its own right; not as predictors of the reliability or validity of the health information displayed on the website. The relationship between conformance to health website accountability and adequacy criteria and the reliability or validity of health information displayed on the website is an empirical question that is beyond the scope of the current program. In the future, the Institute may compile an inventory of published research reports on the subject and undertake additional empirical research.

We welcome your feedback on our conceptual approach. Please provide your comments in Parts 3 to 6 of this workbook.

Purposes of workbook

The purpose of the workbook is to determine which criteria contained in the workbook, and any added by evaluators, should be used to rate health information websites.

Based on the above concepts and program activities to date, we have assembled the following 2 sets of criteria:

- Part 1 – CWW general criteria
- Part 2 – Health website criteria

Part II contains all of the criteria mentioned by authors of 22 instruments or criteria sets to be used to assess health websites. Nevertheless, because we did not analyze all criteria sets developed for this purpose, nor reviewed all articles written about criteria for assessing health websites, the meta-criteria presented here may not be complete. Further, they may not all be necessary. See below.

In summary, the purposes of this workbook are:

- Part 1 – To evaluate the suitability of CWW general criteria for describing and rating websites
- Part 2
 - To elaborate criteria that could be used to rate health websites
 - To evaluate the desirability and feasibility of using each criterion for the stated purpose, and the likely existence (primarily on the website being rated) of the information necessary to operationalize the criterion.
 - To identify issues and concerns that need to be resolved or addressed to develop a practical tool to rate health websites.
- Parts 3 to 7 – To Provide feedback on the conceptual approach and any other aspect of the program.

Purpose of health website rating tool

The purpose of the health website rating tool (being developed here) is to permit potential users of the tool to evaluate the accountability and adequacy of a health website. Ideally, the tool should permit



users to divide reliably and validly health websites into those that are accountable/adequate and those that are not. Potential users are:

- Health professionals
- Consumers (i.e., the average person who searches for health information on the World Wide Web).

Based on evaluation workbook results, we will develop a tool for use by health professionals to rate health websites. Later, we may also develop a separate tool for use by consumers.

After you have completed this workbook, please fax pages to 443-320-0026. Be sure to include the cover memo/fax back form as page 1 of your fax.

Next steps

As next steps we will:

- Compile panel members' evaluations
- Provide a second workbook to finalize criteria to be used by this program to rate health websites
- Develop and test the rating instrument
- Rate health websites.

Additional information

For additional information, please contact Jennifer Mo at 301-816-2875 or by email at jmo@has.com. Please visit www.hii.org for additional information on the background and conceptual approach to the project.



Evaluations

Part 1: Consumer WebWatch descriptors & criteria

Panel member: _____ Organization: _____

The following descriptors and criteria (referred to here collectively as "criteria") were developed by Consumer Webwatch (CWW) to describe and to rate websites. They are intended to apply to all types of websites (although some criteria may apply only to certain types of websites). Only criteria generally considered applicable to health information sites are included here. Excluded are criteria pertaining to customer service (shipping & handling, refunds, consumer services, etc). Note: The omission of some CWW criteria that are not applicable to health websites leaves gaps in the item numbering sequence.

Please:

- Evaluate each criterion listed below as follows: If the item (including specified evaluation categories) should be applied to rate health websites as written/specified, check "OK." If the criterion or evaluation categories should be applied if modified, check "Fix," and mark up your recommended changes (or capture the information on a separate sheet). If the criterion should not be used neither to describe nor to rate health websites, check "No."
- Add any other general criteria (and, if applicable, evaluation categories) that should be used to describe or to rate health websites. Note: Specific health websites criteria follow in the next section. You may want to complete that section before suggesting additional general criteria.

Note: Italics indicate headings; please do not rate headings

ID No.	Website rating criterion	Evaluation		
		OK	Fix	No
<i>Credibility</i>				
<i>Privacy & Security</i>				
1	Security: clear and concise statement of policy? [<input type="checkbox"/> especially clear <input type="checkbox"/> reasonably clear <input type="checkbox"/> unclear/complicated <input type="checkbox"/> no statement]			
3	Indication of security [<input type="checkbox"/> https <input type="checkbox"/> lock & key <input type="checkbox"/> other <input type="checkbox"/> none]			
4	Privacy: Clear and concise statement of policy [<input type="checkbox"/> especially clear <input type="checkbox"/> reasonably clear <input type="checkbox"/> unclear/complicated <input type="checkbox"/> no statement]			
5	Never give personal info to third parties or must "opt in" [<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no]			
6	If not, can user "opt out" [<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no]			
7	Is "opt out" clear and easy to execute [<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no]			
8	Can "opt out" of house email/promotions, etc [<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no]			
9	Ask for more personal info than really needed, without clear purpose [<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no]			
10	Promise not to change policy or (if change) to notify customers directly [<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no]			

ID No.	Criterion	Evaluation		
		OK	Fix	No
11	Location(s) of P&S policy links, eg, bottom of all pages, home page): Easy to find, sensible location of P&S policy links (For P&S this means direct links on home page, end of ordering page) [<input type="checkbox"/> very easy to find/in sensible locations <input type="checkbox"/> fairly easy <input type="checkbox"/> hard to locate/illogical locations]			
12	Disclosure score (global assessment based on above ratings)			
Disclosure section				
<i>Site identity</i>				
42	Contact info [for each of the following: <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no] a. Telephone number b. Email address c. US postal address			
43	Ownership information [<input type="checkbox"/> privately owned <input type="checkbox"/> publicly owned <input type="checkbox"/> unclear ownership <input type="checkbox"/> none]			
44	Does the site contain third party advertising or sponsored information/content links [<input type="checkbox"/> yes, many yes, quite a few <input type="checkbox"/> yes, but very few <input type="checkbox"/> unclear <input type="checkbox"/> no]			
45	Are the site's ads and sponsored links clearly labeled and/or separated to distinguish the ads from contents [<input type="checkbox"/> yes, easy to distinguish <input type="checkbox"/> can distinguish <input type="checkbox"/> no, can hardly distinguish]			
46	If yes, describe methods for distinguishing [for each of the following: <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no] a. Box/banner b. labeled c. Other			
47	Does the site disclose information about the relationship with advertisers and sponsored links/contents [<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no]			
48	Is the disclosure clear and concise [<input type="checkbox"/> especially clear <input type="checkbox"/> reasonably clear <input type="checkbox"/> unclear/complicated <input type="checkbox"/> no statement]			
49	The disclosure indicates that content and advertising/sponsoring relationships are [<input type="checkbox"/> entirely separated/unbiased <input type="checkbox"/> related (describe) <input type="checkbox"/> unclear(describe)]			

ID No.	Criterion	Evaluation		
		OK	Fix	No
50	Location of disclosure (check all that apply) <input type="checkbox"/> about us <input type="checkbox"/> FAQ <input type="checkbox"/> privacy policy <input type="checkbox"/> terms of use <input type="checkbox"/> what's new <input type="checkbox"/> news & media <input type="checkbox"/> press room <input type="checkbox"/> for investors <input type="checkbox"/> for analysis <input type="checkbox"/> marketing info <input type="checkbox"/> for advertisers <input type="checkbox"/> other]			
<i>Business relationships</i>				
51	Does site have business relationships (eg, owners, partners, affiliates, paid placements, etc who could potentially influence impartiality of site [<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> unclear <input type="checkbox"/> no, completely independent]			
52	Is there a disclosure about the business relationships [<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no]			
53	Is the disclosure clear and concise [<input type="checkbox"/> especially clear <input type="checkbox"/> reasonably clear <input type="checkbox"/> unclear/complicated <input type="checkbox"/> no statement]			
54	The disclosure indicates that content and business relationships are [<input type="checkbox"/> entirely separated/unbiased <input type="checkbox"/> related (describe) <input type="checkbox"/> unclear(describe)]			
55	Location of disclosure (check all that apply) <input type="checkbox"/> about us <input type="checkbox"/> FAQ <input type="checkbox"/> privacy policy <input type="checkbox"/> terms of use <input type="checkbox"/> what's new <input type="checkbox"/> news & media <input type="checkbox"/> press room <input type="checkbox"/> for investors <input type="checkbox"/> for analysis <input type="checkbox"/> marketing info <input type="checkbox"/> for advertisers <input type="checkbox"/> other]			
<i>Disclaimers, sources, currency of information, and corrections</i>				
56	Describe amount and impact of disclaimers [<input type="checkbox"/> limited or no disclaimers <input type="checkbox"/> some disclaimers, take limited responsibility for contents, products, etc <input type="checkbox"/> yes, excessive disclaimers, take almost no responsibility for contents, products, etc <input type="checkbox"/> typical legalese <input type="checkbox"/> easy to understand]			
57	Describe any other disclaimers, eg, "Information should only be used in advice" [describe]			
58	Does content/advice/information have a publication date or other means of indicating the currency of information [<input type="checkbox"/> yes, in all or most cases <input type="checkbox"/> yes, in some cases <input type="checkbox"/> no]			

ID No.	Criterion	Evaluation		
		OK	Fix	No
60	Is there an area on the site to indicate corrections [<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no]			
<i>Location/organization of disclosure links</i>				
63	Are all of the disclosure statements (site ID, relationships, disclaimers, currency, etc) grouped together in a sensible location [<input type="checkbox"/> yes in 1 or 2 <input type="checkbox"/> found in more than 2 places and/or in some hard-to-find locations <input type="checkbox"/> all over the place in illogical locations]			
64	Where are the disclosures located [for each of the following: <input type="checkbox"/> about us <input type="checkbox"/> FAQ <input type="checkbox"/> privacy policy <input type="checkbox"/> terms of use <input type="checkbox"/> what's new <input type="checkbox"/> news & media <input type="checkbox"/> press room <input type="checkbox"/> for investors <input type="checkbox"/> for analysis <input type="checkbox"/> marketing info <input type="checkbox"/> for advertisers <input type="checkbox"/> other] a. Site ID b. Relationships c. Disclosure			
65	Disclosure score (global assessment based on above ratings)			
66	Overall credibility score			
<i>Usability/human factors</i>				
<i>Design</i>				
67	Eye knows where to go/easy to look at [<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no] 67a. If no, what's wrong [<input type="checkbox"/> unclear info hierarchies/groupings <input type="checkbox"/> motion <input type="checkbox"/> cluttered <input type="checkbox"/> small or difficult to read typefaces <input type="checkbox"/> extreme color palette, poor/difficult color choices <input type="checkbox"/> line spacing is too close]			
68	Consistency of design across pages [<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no]			
69	Design transparent (task, not design, should be the focus) [<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no]			
70	Overall design score (1-5)			
<i>Navigation components, general</i>				
71	Always know where you are in the site [<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no]			
72	Menus conveniently located [<input type="checkbox"/> top <input type="checkbox"/> left <input type="checkbox"/> bottom]			

ID No.	Criteria	Evaluation		
		OK	Fix	No
73	Key menus available on all pages [<input type="checkbox"/> main <input type="checkbox"/> category <input type="checkbox"/> other]			
74	Helpful tools to navigate [<input type="checkbox"/> breadcrumbs <input type="checkbox"/> dynamic drop-down menus <input type="checkbox"/> page number links <input type="checkbox"/> previous buttons <input type="checkbox"/> sub- category menus <input type="checkbox"/> must use browser's "back" button <input type="checkbox"/> no/few helpful tools]			
75	Reasonable number of clicks to get to where you want [<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no]			
76	Intuitive to navigate [<input type="checkbox"/> very <input type="checkbox"/> somewhat <input type="checkbox"/> no]			
77	Can sort products (information) in useful ways [<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no]			
79	Are components of site well-integrate [<input type="checkbox"/> especially well <input type="checkbox"/> reasonably well <input type="checkbox"/> not well-integrated <input type="checkbox"/> NA]			
<i>Browserbility</i>				
80	Sensible customer focused categories [<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no]			
81	Category lists include enough descriptive information to select item to look at further [<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no]			
82	Found on every page (or almost every page) [<input type="checkbox"/> yes, an open box <input type="checkbox"/> only via a link]			
83	Key-word or pre-specified category search only [<input type="checkbox"/> keyword <input type="checkbox"/> pre-specified <input type="checkbox"/> other]			
84	Can search by [describe]			
85	Can use everyday terminology? Fully cross- referenced? Returns sensible matches? Restricted in any way? [describe]			
86	Overall navigation score (1-5)			
<i>Additional criteria (please add below); if necessary, use additional sheets</i>				

Part 2: Health website criteria

The following criteria were developed from 22 instruments or criteria sets intended to be used to assess health websites. Please

- Elaborate criteria
 - Read through the criteria presented in this workbook; add, in the space provided, at the end of listed criteria, any others you think we should include in a tool to rate health websites
 - If you want to accuse the wording of a criterion, please work it up.
 - Please enter comments in the space provided on *page 10*; key your comments to the criterion ID number.
- Evaluate criteria (listed below and any you may have added)
- For each criterion listed (and any added), rate each one on the following 3 scales
 - *Desirability* (0/1-5 scale) — The desirability or importance of including the criterion in any tool to be used by the target, intended users (listed in the evaluation format column heading; also see below)
 - 0 (zero) Should not be included in the tool (for any reason)
 - 1 Unimportant to include in tool to rate health websites (for specified target users of the tool), regardless of its feasibility or existence for the purpose.
 - 5 Essential to include in tool to rate health websites
 - *Feasibility* (0/1-5 scale) — The feasibility that the target, intended users of the tool (listed in the evaluation format column heading; also see below) could reliably apply the criterion to rate health websites (assuming that they have access to the information necessary to operationalize the criterion; see next scale)
 - 0 (zero) Criterion (as stated presently) is not a criterion that can be used to rate health websites
 - 1 Targeted users of the health website rating tool would find it very difficult to apply the criterion (e.g., because its application needs special knowledge or experience likely to be possessed only by an expert)
 - 5 Could easily and reliably be applied by target users of the health website rating tool (assuming they have access to the necessary information)
 - *Existence* (0/1-5) — The extent that the information necessary to operationalize the criterion can be expected to exist (i.e., be found on a health website that is being rated).
 - 0 (zero) Criterion (as stated presently) is not a criterion that can be used to rate health websites or is irrelevant
 - 1 Very unlikely that sufficient information exists on the average health website to operationalize the criterion (regardless of whether or not it should exist there).
 - 5 Very likely that sufficient information exists on the average health website to operationalize the criterion.
- We are interested in you evaluations of the desirability and feasibility of criteria from the following 2 perspectives (each representing different types of potential users)
 - Health professionals
 - Consumers (the average person using the WWW to search for health information).

Note: Please describe, in Part 7, any issues or concerns we should address or need to resolve in developing tools to rate the quality or adequacy of health websites (one for use by health professionals; the other by consumers).



Panel member: _____ Organization: _____

Note: Italics indicate headings; please do not rate headings

I.D No.	Criterion	Desirability (0-5)		Feasibility (0-5)		Existence (0-5)
		Professionals	Consumers	Professionals	Consumers	
<i>1</i>	<i>Content relevance</i>					
1.1	Purpose/Mission/Scope Does site state its purpose? Is it to provide information on health topics to consumers?					
1.1.1	Is the mission stated? Does mission statement convey purpose & scope of website?					
1.1.2	Scope: Does site state its scope?					
1.1.3	Objective/Goals: Does site state its objective?					
1.1.4	Does site indicate title/subject of site?					
1.2	Audience: Does site state its intended audience?					
1.3	Relevance: Is content of site relevant to one's search purpose?					
1.4	Breadth, depth, coverage, completeness, uniqueness					
1.4.1	Is information unique or can it be found elsewhere?					
1.5	Site consists only of links?					
<i>2</i>	<i>Content accessibility, presentation, design</i>					
2.1	Comprehensibility: Is site prepared at level that is useful to intended audience?					
2.1.1	Is it comprehensible by the average consumer?					
2.2	<i>Navigability, logical organization</i>					
2.2.1	Is information needed to use evaluation checklist easily accessible on site?					
2.2.2	Is site content easily accessible?					
2.2.3	Is site easily navigable?					

ID No.	Criterion	Desirability (0-5)		Feasibility (0-5)		Existence (0-5)
		Professionals	Consumers	Professionals	Consumers	
2.2.4	Does it contain search engine?					
2.2.5	Is site designed in a user-friendly manner?					
2.2.6	Is there a site index, table of contents?					
2.3	Does site organize information in a consumer-friendly way?					
2.4	Readability: Is text, graphics, video etc consumer friendly?					
2.4.1	Does site contain images?					
2.4.2	Is site available in text only mode?					
2.4.3	If user can't access images, is information still 'complete'?					
2.5	Downloadability					
2.6	Are there conditions to accessing content?					
2.6.1	Is there a fee to access content?					
2.6.2	Does the user have to register?					
2.6.3	Does accessing content require acceptance of cookies?					
2.7	Presentation of website: Is it appealing?					
3.0	<i>Content selection/editorial policy</i>					
3.1	Editorial policy, site evaluation process, peer review process: Does site describe how it searched for and selected the information displayed on site?					
3.1.1	Was search strategy adequate to site's purpose? Does site display search results?					
3.1.2	Was selection method adequate to site's purpose? Does site display selection results?					
3.2	<i>Conflict of interest, bias, disclosure of sponsorship, funding sources</i>					
3.2.1	Does site provide conflict of interest policy?					

ID No.	Criterion	Desirability (0-5)		Feasibility (0-5)		Existence (0-5)
		Professionals	Consumers	Professionals	Consumers	
3.2.2	Does site report relationship between authors of content and the owner, sponsor etc of site?					
4.0	<i>Content validity/accuracy</i>					
4.1	Does site differentiate between reports/information/facts and so on?					
4.1.1	Is the content thorough and detailed?					
4.1.2	Is information accurate?					
4.2	Does site give author's information?					
4.2.1	Author's name					
4.2.2	Author's credentials					
4.3	Does site indicate date report was written or last updated?					
4.4	Does site give source of information?					
4.4.1	Link to the source?					
4.4.2	Authors of the source					
4.4.3	Date source information was generated or published					
4.4.4	Date information was posted on the site					
4.4.5	Bibliography/resource list					
4.4.6	Type of source					
4.5	Does site indicate if specific information was evaluated?					
4.5.1	Does site indicate how information was evaluated?					
4.5.2	Are methods adequate to their purpose?					
4.6	Does site state evidence grade of specific information?					
4.6.1	Does site describe how evidence grade was assessed?					
4.6.2	Are methods adequate to their purpose?					
4.7	Does site indicate limitations on applicability of specific information?					

ID No.	Criterion	Desirability (0-5)		Feasibility (0-5)		Existence (0-5)
		Professionals	Consumers	Professionals	Consumers	
4.8	Does site state if it carries advertising?					
4.8.1	Does site distinguish between advertising and content?					
4.8.2	Does it provide advertising policy?					
4.8.3	Is its advertising policy appropriate for consumers?					
5	<i>Content interchange, interactivity</i>					
5.1	Is there a way for consumers to request additional information?					
5.2	Does site offer decision support technology?					
5.2.1	If so, does site describe system used for this purpose?					
5.2.2	Are specific caveats given regarding the system's use?					
5.2.3	Does site describe how DST was developed & validated?					
5.2.4	When was DST last updated/validated?					
5.3	If site offers exchange of information between consumers and health professionals, does site describe their credentials?					
5.3.1	Is it obvious to consumers when they are interacting with health professional?					
6.0	<i>Site transparency/credibility /currency</i>					
6.1	Does site say who owns or pays for or created it?					
6.1.1	Does it list a physical location, tel. no, contact person?					
6.2	Does site say who runs it?					
6.2.1	Does it list a physical location, tel., contact person?					
6.3	Does site provide email address for webmaster?					

ID No.	Criterion	Desirability (0-5)		Feasibility (0-5)		Existence (0-5)
		Professionals	Consumers	Professionals	Consumers	
6.4	Does site describe sponsor's purpose or business?					
6.5	Does site disclose sources of financing of sponsoring organization?					
6.6	<i>Currency</i>					
6.6.1	When was site first created?					
6.6.2	How frequently is site or site content updated?					
6.6.3	Does site indicate when it was last updated?					
6.6.4	Does site indicate date until which the content is valid?					
6.7	Is site essential 'complete'?					
6.8	If site is moderated, is moderator's identity disclosed?					
6.8.1	Are credentials, affiliations, etc of moderator disclosed?					
6.8.2	Is method used to select moderator disclosed?					
7.0	<i>Links</i>					
7.1	Does site link to other sites?					
7.2	Does site indicate if it has evaluated adequacy of sites to which it displays links?					
7.2.1	Does site describe basis for such evaluation?					
7.3	Does site provide appropriate descriptions, disclosures, & disclaimers about links?					
7.4	Are consumers alerted when they leave site?					
7.5	Does site report its policy for periodically checking integrity of links?					
7.6	Does site contain email links to authors of content?					
8	<i>QA/QI</i>					
8.1	Does site describe quality management or QA/QI process?					

ID No.	Criterion	Desirability (0-5)		Feasibility (0-5)		Existence (0-5)
		Professionals	Consumers	Professionals	Consumers	
8.1.1	Does QA/QI include accessibility?					
8.1.2	Relevance?					
8.1.3	Content selection, validity, and/or interchange?					
8.1.4	Transparency/credibility?					
8.1.5	Links?					
8.1.6	Safeguards?					
8.2	If so, are QA/QI processes adequate to their purpose?					
8.3	Does site permit easy feedback from consumers?					
9.0	<i>Safeguards</i>					
9.1	Does site display terms and conditions of use of the website, incl. users' rights?					
9.2	Does site display its privacy or confidentiality policy?					
9.2.1	Is it adequate for informing consumers?					
9.3	Does site display disclaimers on use of information it contains?					
9.3.1	Are they adequate to informing consumers on limitations of use of information displayed on website?					
10.0	<i>Additional criteria (please add below); if necessary, use additional sheets</i>					



For use with Parts 1 & 2: Comments on criteria listed in workbook

Panel member: _____ Organization: _____

- *Key criterion to comment (using criterion ID number)*
- *If necessary, copy sheet. If preferred, word process comments.*

Criterion ID	Comments on criteria



Feedback

Optional Part 3: Comments on criteria for criteria

Panel member: _____ Organization: _____

- *If necessary, copy sheet. If preferred, word process comments.*

For purposes of the Health Website Ratings project, the Institute developed the following criteria for criteria for evaluating the quality of health websites.

Criteria for rating health-oriented websites should be:

- Potentially useful, and intelligible, to consumers
- Practical to apply by their intend user (consumers or qualified health professionals, as applicable)
- Applicable, or contribute, to the assessment of health-oriented websites
- Operationalizable by information displayed on the website to be rated; including, when applicable, the absence of information displayed on the website
- Reliable (different raters or the same rater on different occasions should reach the same conclusion when applying the criterion to the same information displayed on or absent from a website).

Collectively, use of criteria meeting the above-listed criteria should result in the reliable and valid differentiation of a "credible" or "high quality" health website (*eg, as defined by the HWR project*) from other health websites.

Part 3 comments:

Optional Part 4: Comments on types of health websites

For purposes of conducting the program, the Institute has identified the following types of health websites:

- Health communication website (to communicate health information to consumers, health professionals, or other specified groups of individuals), including
 - Health information website (to communicate descriptions and data to inform decisions regarding a person's or population's health or health care, including interventions to promote health and wellness and to prevent or to manage disease or its effects and treatment's side-effects, including prevention strategies, diagnostic test, all sorts of treatments, and rehabilitative regimens. It may be intended for health professionals or for consumers. Health information is a broad term, and includes news of developments as well as such substantive information as treatments for diseases. It does not include any of the following types of health communication websites
 - Decision support website (to provide tools to assist consumers, health professionals, or other users to make health care or other health-related decisions, including selecting a health plan or provider and deciding among alternative treatments). Note: For this purpose, a DST is an interactive website that requires the user to input or permit access to data about an individual and once activated responds with a decision indicator or advice based on an explicit or implied expert system or decision model.
 - Health ratings website (to communicate to consumers, health professionals, or other specified groups of individuals information on the performance of health care providers, the quality of health websites, etc)
 - Health resource website (to provide access to such health-oriented resources as library collection, book, and journal articles); includes MEDLINE
 - Health advice on-line (to provide on-line answers to health questions and/or support); includes "chat rooms"
- Behavior modification website (to support individuals who want to modify their behavior, eg, stop smoking, loose weight, exercise regularly), including
 - Self-help website (to provide tools to facilitate the change management process)
 - Disease management website (to support interventions that include off-line interactions with health practitioners). Note: For this purpose, mention that the website is part of a "clinical trial" or other research project relating to individual behavioral change, etc should be regarded as a clue that the website is a disease management website (if it is not a behavioral change website). A website that is a substitute for a facility-based disease management program is considered to be a behavior modification website.
- On-line product sites, including
 - On-line pharmacies (to purchase prescription drugs on-line). Note: For this purpose, herbal and other dietary supplements are not "drugs." If the website sells on-line drugs and other products, consider it to be an "on-line pharmacy."
 - On-line stores (to purchase health-related products other than drugs via the Internet)
 - Health product marketing website (to provide product information and/or refer people to bricks-and mortar stores and/or health practitioners). Note: For this purpose, sites whose primary purpose is to convey to consumers information about prescription drugs (actions, side effects, support line number, etc), whether or not sponsored by a drug company, should be classified as a "health product marketing website."



- Health care organization website, including
 - Health plan website, including government, employers, Blue Cross Blue Shield, health insurers, HMOs and other types of MCOs (to inform applicants and enrollees about benefits, premiums, network providers, etc and/or to permit enrolling in the plan, filing claims, etc)
 - Health provider website, including hospitals, nursing homes, home care agencies, and other types of health care facilities and agencies, and physicians, dentists, and other types of health care practitioners (to inform patients about services, fees, qualifications of staff, hours of operation, etc)
 - Other types of health care organization website, including laboratories, blood and tissue banks, ambulances, etc (to inform users of their services).

Note: Some health websites may contain one or more of the above types.

Panel member: _____ Organization: _____

- *If necessary, copy sheet. If preferred, word process comments.*

Part 4 comments:

Optional Part 5: Comments on accessibility, relevance, and validity

When consumers search for health information websites, they face the following 3 problems:

- Accessibility — includes
 - Finding a website that contains the information for which they are searching — this is a problem of Internet search engines and is not considered further here
 - Finding information on the discovered website, and the structure of that information which affects its accessibility to the user
 - Comprehending the information once found on the website
- Relevance — a judgment that the consumer who discovers the website must make. However, the website may provide consumers with clues to help to decide if what they have found is relevant to their purpose
- Validity, i.e., the reliability or scientific soundness of information, includes
 - Currency — when the website (a webpage or web-piece) was last updated/edited
 - Structure — eg, credentials of authors
 - Process — eg, editorial policy/process, in such terms as
 - Search for relevant information
 - Compilation of identified information/writing
 - QA/peer review/fact checking
 - Substantiation of "facts" by specific reference to the published literature or other sources
 - Outcome — the reliability of the information for the intended purpose, including
 - Completeness — context for use of information
 - Comprehensiveness — no omission of important relevant facts
 - Accuracy of what is stated, including
 - Objectivity of presentation
 - If the information pertains to a controversial topic (where science is silent, evidence conflicts, and/or opinions of qualified experts disagree), the controversy is surfaced and discussed appropriately
 - Important facts are supported by pertinent references to the medical literature or other appropriate sources
 - Material is coherent; not contradictory
 - Organization and presentation of material is clear; not muddled, including no superfluous or extraneous material (so that the consumer may become confused and draws the wrong conclusion from the material).

Please comment on next page

