

“All That Glisters Is Not Gold”^[1]

By Atholl Reid, Director and TAS Coordinator OML

The Internet is a wonderful thing: long live the internet!

It is a great place for finding out ... **stuff** ... and it has quickly pervaded almost every part of our lives. Many of us have a small device that fits in our hand and gives us access to a vast amount of information with a speed that was unthinkable a few years ago. For example, a current handheld device has far more computing power than the main computer on Apollo 11, which went to the moon and back ^[3] (there's still a lot of geek in me).

In the last few months several phrases have become more commonly used and part of our everyday vocabulary, though some of them have been around for many years, such as **fake news** ^[4] and **alternative truth** ^[5].

And hereby lies a conundrum: how do I make sure that what I read is real “gold” and not “brown and smelly”?

The old adage “if it sounds too good to be true then it probably isn't true” still stands for information on the Internet.

Next, look at where the information comes from: is it from a reputable source? If you don't recognise the source then have a look at what else comes from there.

So far in this article I have given five references, one reference having its own reference. If you read something similar to “research shows” then follow up any references given and check that they are being correctly cited and it is not a case of cherry picking ^[6]. If there are not any references, try a search for a phrase from the item, often the first dozen or so words will get some pages to look at to help you decide the veracity of the claim(s) being made.

How recent is the information being cited? The medical world is changing fast and older findings may no longer hold due to different, more targeted and refined treatments. The best treatment carried out five years ago may no longer be the best treatment available.

Another consideration: how did you get to the item that you are reading?

- Was it from a reputable site?

If so, then it is more likely to also be a reputable site, though there is advertising revenue to take in to account – people pay more to have their links on reputable sites.

- Was it from a web search?

The top results may be there because they have paid to be there, not because they are more reputable and reliable.

- Was it from a social media posting?

Very often social media postings are not verified before being posted and this may result in a case of egg on face.

- Click bait ^[7] has one reason for being – to make money.

One of the most powerful tools used to verify research and validate information is peer review ^[8], the checking of work by people of similar expertise to those who wrote the work; a form of self-regulation within the relevant field. This maintains standards and is employed extensively in academic areas.

Many of the references here are to Wikipedia, which is peer reviewed in that it is open for update by and new contributions from the Internet community.

The Internet has a number of hoax and urban legend websites such as Snopes ^[9] and Hoax-Slayer ^[10], to name but two of many that can be used as part of the investigation of the validity of what you read. As stated earlier, a search for a phrase or the first dozen or so words will get some pages to look.

As I was finishing this article, I found an item on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) website by Claudia Hammond ^[11], an award winning broadcaster whose work includes the area of health, entitled *How To Spot Misleading Health News* ^[12]. It gives a “ ...10-step guide to navigating medical headlines ... ” to help “ ... weed out the flaky science and dangerous claims”.

In the article *How To Spot Misleading Health* it states “When the UK newspaper, the Independent, analysed the 20 most shared stories in the past year with cancer in the headline, more than half included claims which health authorities or doctors had discredited. Yet many millions of people had considered them interesting enough to share on social media.”

As Oncology Massage Therapists, we work with people who may be in a vulnerable position, with information and advice coming at them from many sources. The Oncology Massage Limited (OML) Code of Practice ^[13], which OML trained therapists sign, covers a range of topics including Scope Of Work, Diagnosis, Undue Influence, Professional Courtesy et al., all of which protect us as therapists and our clients. We have a responsibility to our clients and ourselves to be aware of what we talk about and how we phrase it, and this is built upon our knowledge of the field in which we work.

In summary, if you read something on the Internet, treat it with caution until you have investigated it. Some of it may be true and some of it may not be.

Caveat Lector ^[14].

Please note: most of the content of this article came from the Internet and to it I applied many of the points that I have mentioned above. **That does not mean that it is correct!** It is up to the reader to judge what you read (Caveat Lector ^[14]), what people tell you (Caveat Audiens) and what you see (I don't know, and couldn't find, any Latin for this... and anyway, having Latin in it does not automatically mean that it is good information.)

Further reading:

This list may be found at the bottom of the page

<http://www.whoishostingthis.com/resources/credible-sources/>

- Evaluating the Legitimacy of Online Sources
http://www.edb.utexas.edu/petrosino/Legacy_Cycle/mf_jm/Challenge%201/website%20reliable.pdf
- Important Questions to Consider Regarding Web Resources
<http://etc.usf.edu/techease/win/internet/how-can-my-students-know-if-a-web-source-is-reliable/>
- How to Evaluate the Credibility of an Online Resource
<http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/research/credibility1.html>
- Seven Points to Consider When Assessing a Website's Credibility
<http://www.fdu.edu/newspubs/magazine/01fa/side.html>
- Six Things to Look for When Evaluating a Web Resource
<https://uknowit.uwgb.edu/page.php?id=30276>
- Evaluating the Information on a Website
http://www.svc.edu/library/docs/credible_websites.pdf
- Looking at a Web Resource in a Critical Way
<http://chfs.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/CEC5CEE4-63CB-4150-A8F3-A3852B0E66F0/0/EvaluateWebSites.pdf>
- Tips for Checking the Legitimacy of an Online Resource
http://library.columbia.edu/locations/undergraduate/evaluating_web.html
- Evaluating Internet Sources: Tips and Tricks for Evaluating Web Sites
<http://ait.libguides.com/c.php?g=280089&p=1866882>

Sources for this article included:

How to Judge the Reliability of Internet Information

<http://www.mhhe.com/mayfieldpub/webtutor/judging.htm>

How to evaluate health information on the internet: questions and answers

https://ods.od.nih.gov/Health_Information/How_To_Evaluate_Health_Information_on_the_Internet_Questions_and_Answers.aspx

How to Search and Determine Credible Sources on the Internet

<http://www.whoishostingthis.com/resources/credible-sources/>

The web sites listed at the bottom of the page

<http://www.whoishostingthis.com/resources/credible-sources/>

References:

- [1] The title of this piece may not be the version that you know because more commonly it is stated in its more popular/modern form “all that glitters is not gold”. The “glisters” version occurs in Shakespeare’s play *The Merchant Of Venice* ^[2].
- [2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_that_glitters_is_not_gold
- [3] <http://www.computerweekly.com/feature/Apollo-11-The-computers-that-put-man-on-the-moon>
- [4] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fake_news_\(disambiguation\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fake_news_(disambiguation))
- [5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternative_facts
- [6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cherry_picking
- [7] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clickbait>
- [8] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peer_review
- [9] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoax_Slayer
<http://hoax-slayer.com/>
- [10] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snopes.com>
<http://www.snopes.com/>
- [11] <http://www.claudiahammond.com/>
- [12] <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20170207-how-to-spot-misleading-health-news>
- [13] <http://www.oncologymassagetraining.com.au/userfiles/OMT%20Code%20of%20Practice%20Aug%202015%20Published.pdf>
- [14] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caveat_emptor#Caveat_lector