WEBSITE REVIEWS

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Hot Topics in General Practice
http://www.hot-topics.co.uk

Developers and sponsors
This website has been developed by BIOS Scientific Publishers Limited (BIOS). The company was founded in 1989 as a specialist publisher for textbooks of biology and medicine, and is based in Oxford, UK. The website is operated solely by BIOS, and so a number of books are promoted both on the site and through links.

Purpose
The target audience includes specialist registrars in general practice, general practitioners and trainers in general practice. ‘Hot Topics’ advertises itself as the ‘ideal revision source for MRCGP candidates’, and aims to present up-to-date information relevant to general practice and for those preparing for the MRCGP examination.

Content
The website features information from Hot Topics in General Practice by Ese Stacey (4th edn published by BIOS in April 2002), and also supplies summaries of what the authors consider to be important journal articles. The journals that feature most frequently are from British Medical Journal, British Journal of General Practice and Evidence Based Medicine. The website is updated regularly and features summaries from articles as soon as they are published in the literature.

The site requires the user to purchase either a personal subscription or a practice licence. The annual personal subscription for the whole site for 12 months is £40. However, you can subscribe to MRCGP examination-specific topics for a 6 month period at a cost of £25. In addition, there is an option to ‘browse and search’ some of the site free of charge, to sign up for e-mail alerts and to develop a customized home page. This requires inputting personal details and a password to the site. There is no requirement to submit proof of medical registration, which means that the site (at this level) is open to all.

The main areas of the site include an A–Z index of topics, ‘Summaries’ and ‘What’s New’ sections. Prior to registering for ‘browse and search’, examples of two topics (alcohol and hormone replacement therapy) are given free of charge. Each allows access to a list of key points, references, further reading and related topics. Clicking on certain articles listed in ‘What’s New’ and ‘Summaries’ also allows access to these lists. Full text versions of the articles can only be viewed by taking out a full subscription, otherwise the content is limited at this level.

The site has links to the BIOS bookshop, information about the MRCGP examination (in pdf format), which is extracted from Hot Topics in General Practice, a help page with a list of frequently asked questions (or FAQs), and a page ‘about the site’ that explains the purpose of the site and how to subscribe.

Other links are limited to BIOS, Ese Stacey’s MRCGP examination site, British Medical Journal, the British Medical Journal Bookshop, the Royal College of General Practitioners, British Journal of General Practice and past issues of Evidence Based Medicine.

Confidentiality
A privacy policy is available through a link on the home page. This covers security details, outlines the information the publishers may collect from the user, and describes how these data may be shared and utilized.

Design
The website is basic and easy to navigate. It has an uncluttered home page, with a section to ‘sign in’ for registered users. There are clear links to other areas of the site. The access speed is reasonable, but the search facility is slow.

Evaluation
This site is ideal for specialist registrars in general practice who are preparing for the MRCGP examination, and also for general practitioners (including trainers). It may also be of use to candidates preparing for the AFOM examination. However, in general, I think it would be of limited use to occupational physicians except as a reference tool, and then only if the user subscribed to allow access to full text documents.

Scores
Access speed: 3/5
Speed of searches: 1/5
User friendliness: 3/5
Links to other websites: 2/5
Overall score: 2/5
This site is likely to be of interest to practitioners in this field rather than to occupational physicians in general.

Pat Bayman

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**Fit for travel**

[www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk)

Developers and sponsors

This website is provided by the NHS in Scotland. It is compiled and updated by a team of experts from the Travel Medicine Division at the Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health (SCIEH). The SCIEH team also produces an interactive online database for health care professionals called TRAVAX ([www.travax.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.travax.scot.nhs.uk)). The site's advisory panel is made up of medical and nursing experts from different specialities (travel medicine, tropical medicine, infectious diseases, general practice, occupational health and armed forces) and the Malaria Prevention Advisory Panel for the UK (which is managed by the PHLIS), and also takes into account advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations for the UK (JCVI). The website is funded by the Health Department of the Scottish Executive.

**Purpose**

The website provides general information and advice to travellers based in the UK. Any of the pages on the website can be printed as fact sheets, apart from the information provided in ‘Current News’.

**Content**

From the home page, the user can access sections on current news, general advice, malaria prevention, special travellers, and further information. Within current news, there are summaries on infection outbreaks throughout the World, for example, ‘rubella in Tonga’. The general advice section lists options from ‘accidents’ to ‘yellow fever infected areas’, and touches on areas of interest to the occupational physician including culture shock, and common medical conditions including diabetes. Information on malaria prevention concentrates on simple lifestyle measures that the individual can take, rather than detailed malaria prophylaxis issues. The section on advice for special groups of travellers includes information for business travellers, long-term expatriates, and those undertaking remote travel, which again may be of use to occupational physicians. Lastly, the further information section provides helpful sources of additional data and allows shortcuts to other websites, including the British Foreign Office Safety Advice for Travellers and the World Health Organization International Travel and Health site.

Regarding data updates, the most recent material in current news had been installed about 10 days prior to the date when I accessed the website. The TRAVAX website promises ‘up to the minute’ travel health information, but I was unable to put this to the test as an unregistered user of that site.

**Design**

The fitfortravel website is very easy to use and allows access to information on vaccination and malaria prophylaxis for specific destinations using a world map, listed regions or an A-to-Z index. Accessing the data using the maps requires the user to have a very basic level of expertise, with maps being colour coded for infected zones for specific diseases (for example, yellow fever). Searching the website using the links at the foot of the home page (to current news, general advice, malaria prevention, special travellers and further information) is also very straightforward, and the links to other websites provide rapid access to the user.

**Evaluation**

The fitfortravel site provides good basic information for the general public, which is its stated aim. It is also useful to the occupational health professional when searching for general travel advice. However, when dealing with ‘specialist travellers’ (including business or remote travellers), the clinician is likely to require access to additional sources of data and a means of interacting with colleagues in order to manage patients’ needs. Changes in knowledge and attitude are reflected in the details provided, and reflect a consensus of the expert panel’s advice.

A big selling point for the fitfortravel site is that access to the site is free! The TRAVAX website which is also mentioned in this review ([www.travax.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.travax.scot.nhs.uk)) is free of charge for those using the service for NHS purposes in Scotland. There is a token charge for NHS users in other parts of the UK (e.g. £50 for health centres); however, some ‘interested parties’ in England and Wales have taken out group subscriptions for their own regions.

**Confidentiality**

You do not have to register to use the fitfortravel website, but only registered users have access to the information on TRAVAX via a user name and password. You can register for TRAVAX online, and should receive your user name and password within a few days. I should state that I did not pursue registration for TRAVAX, and therefore cannot confirm this statement!