The Health On the Net Foundation

The **Health On the Net Foundation (HON)** is a **not-for-profit**, **nongovernmental** (NGO) organization, headquartered in Geneva (Switzerland). Since 1996, the Foundation has been committed to **guiding users worldwide towards trustworthy health information on the Internet**. The inception of the Foundation dates back to a conference in 1995, where distinguished participating organizations – the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the European Laboratory for Particle Physics (CERN), the European Commission, the National Library of Medicine, and the G-7 Global Healthcare Applications Project – decided that there is a need to **improve the quality of health information online** under the responsibility of webmasters, and to **improve access to trustworthy health information**.

QUALITY OF HEALTH INFORMATION: The HONcode of Conduct

To achieve **the goal of improving the quality of online health information**, HON certifies websites providing health information. The certification of a website is free-of-charge and based on the **HONcode of conduct**, which consists of **eight ethical principles** (http://www.hon.ch/HONcode/Webmasters/Visitor/visitor.html/). These ethical principles include, for example, the clear distinction between content and advertisement, and the provision of references and sources. In short, the evaluation is more focused on how the health information is presented on the website, and not specifically on the medical content itself. Websites are evaluated periodically and in addition, control mechanisms indicate possible non-respect of the HONcode and help reduce these non-respects. The public plays an important role in making sure that the HONcode certified websites continue to respect the HONcode principles.

HON has certified more than 8,000 websites in over 100 countries worldwide and has local representations in, for example, **Mali** and **South Africa**.

ACCESS TO HEALTH INFORMATION: HON Specialized Search Engines

HON is actively improving the access to reliable sources of medical and health information with advanced yet user-friendly search engines and directories, including e.g.

- **HONcode Hunt**: A database of trustworthy websites adhering to the HONcode principles (includes large websites with thousands of web pages)
- **HONselect**: Encyclopedia of 33,000 medical items in 7 languages, 17 million MEDLINE articles, 52,000 ongoing clinical trials, 3,000 news sources

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT: HON Participation in European Projects

In addition, HON participates in scientific research analyzing possibilities improving the access to online health information. These research projects (e.g. in collaboration with the European Union) are focused on the development of search engines, toolbars and so on to improve the access to health information online. The EU Project **KHRESMOI** aims to develop a multilingual, multimodal search and access system for biomedical information and documents. KHRESMOI will combine multiple data sources and knowledge derived from various heterogeneous knowledge sources. HON participates in the project as the leader of work package 8. (http://www.khresmoi.eu/)

ACHIEVEMENTS: International Recognition

2010 – HON is granted the status Category A Liaison to the Health Informatics Technical Committee (ISO/TC 215) of the **International Organization for Standardization (ISO)**.
2007 – HON begins collaboration with the **French National Authority for Health** (Haute Autorité de Santé, HAS). Currently HON is the official certifying body of French health websites.
2004 – HON wins the **European Union's eEurope Award for eHealth** in the category "eHealth Information Tools and Services for Citizens." The award, presented at a ministerial-level conference, recognizes HON's innovative initiatives in the area of eHealth in Europe.
2002 – The European Commission, in collaboration with HON, decides to establish a set of **quality criteria for health-related websites** incorporating all eight HONcode principles.
2002 – HON becomes an **NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations**, in recognition of its international role, neutrality and expertise.