Reviewer's report

Title: Wikis, blogs and podcasts: a new generation of Web-based tools for virtual collaborative clinical practice and education

Version: 2 Date: 24 May 2006

Reviewer: Diane Skiba

Reviewer's report:

General

This is an interesting area and as the authors have indicated one that has received considerable attention in the literature and on the web itself. I think as we move towards Web2.0 and beyond, we will find a multitude of tools that will be available for learning and for clinical practice.

You have an impressive set of web sites and examples.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
My comments are Major Compulsory Revisions.

I think in the trying to be comprehensive and cover many different perspectives, this article has become diffuse. The article would be strengthened with a clearly defined purpose or goals at the beginning. It is not clear. The paper seems to cover the waterfront without a clearly defined purpose.

In your abstract and introduction, you mention that health-related professionals and educational services increasingly adopt these applications. I think you need to clarify if your argument is around the advantages and disadvantages of these tools with higher education, patients or for continuing education. These are three different audiences with different learning needs and in some cases three different purposes.

I also think there needs to be clarity and distinction between using a wiki source for obtaining information and knowledge versus using the tool as a method of collaboration. For example, I am on a committee that uses the wiki tool as a means to share dialogue and information about the committee work. Having student quote from wiki as sources of authority for their knowledge or referencing materials from a wiki or blog is different than using the tools to allow students to engage in learning with each other. For example having students use the tools as a collaborative environment to construct their knowledge or be part of a community of practice.

In the overview of applications, you mention several different sites like Flu Wiki, and then some blog sites. These do not appear to really describe how higher education is using these tools. The Flu Wiki is focused on health care professionals. It would strengthen the paper to present exemplars for each of the tools in terms of how educators are using them in their educational programmes. It would be important in these examples to speak to the underlying pedagogy. There seems to be limited information about how instructors are using these tools in their courses/programs/educational experiences.

The underpinning pedagogy is very limited and should be revised. Pedagogy is not really discussed. You mention drawbacks of distance learning briefly and the references are fairly old. You also talk about quality concerns of e-learning. How is this related? Then you speculate about the potential of the combination of all three tools as mind tools. I would completely revise this section. Here is a suggestion, in your explanation of examples of use of these tools in higher education, you can discuss the underlying pedagogy along with the usage.

Your discussion section seems to be very general and there is a lack of evidence to support some of your statements. Is there evidence to support your statement that Podcasts offer superior support for auditory learners. Your disadvantages seem like potential or hypothetical possibilities. Have these vandalisms occurred? Are there examples where copyright violations have occurred?

Your remedies seem to address technical handling of monitoring input or a closed situation in which the administrator has complete control. How does this help the educator? Again, I think the issue arises in...
terms of how will the educator use this remedy to warn students who use knowledge from blogs, wikis and podcasts or to use these tools to enhance or create learning environments for students?

I am a bit confused by the last section on what’s next. It sounds like one is advocating the blending of all three tools as a methodology when we have no real data (evaluative or research) that leads one to believe that any one tool is effective in facilitation of learning. The Yahoo 360 and Journal Review seems out of place in this section. Again what is the purpose of this article?

I think the statement “eye-opener paper we have argued that these tools would prove useful on the long run for virtual collaborative clinical practice and learning, based on the” seems a bit overstated and without sufficient evidence.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
The only competing interest is that I have written several columns on emerging technologies for the nursing profession.