

A Wikipedia wizard and blogger

Bertalan Mesko combines being an editor and administrator of Wikipedia with medical student studies, as Tiago Villanueva found out

How did you get involved with Wikipedia?

In 2005 I started editing the Hungarian Wikipedia and later became an administrator. In October 2006 I became an administrator in the English Wikipedia. Now I maintain the medicine portal, medicine wiki, and medical collaboration of the week, and I'm the creator and maintainer of the medical genetics wiki.

How do you think Wikipedia will develop?

Wikipedia has a great future. The most common criticism is that it can be edited by anyone. The most important task for Wikipedia editors is to reference statements, numbers, and dates. I won't consider an article reliable if it lacks appropriate references, even if it is written by a professor.

Why blog?

To be honest, in the first month it was just for fun. Now it feels more like work, but I still love it. Web 2.0 will play an important role in the future of medicine. Hundreds of web tools are created for physicians and scientists, and I try to present these to them. I've made several blogtutorials (interviews by email)—for example, with Michael Breus, the American sleep doctor, and Juan Magdaraog, a leading clinical geneticist who is blogging about his fight with Pompe disease. Because of my blog and Wikipedia work, I've been mentioned in *Nature Medicine* and Medscape.

What are your career plans after graduation?

Specialist training in the United States or in the United Kingdom. I plan to pledge my life to personalised genetics and find a way to tell physicians from all medical specialties about these web 2.0 tools created for them.

Is genetics given priority at medical school?

In my opinion, no. I can tell you only how Hungarian medical education works. To become a physician in Hungary, you have to finish 12 semesters. Human genetics takes one semester and clinical genetics takes another. Genetics has a role in nearly all medical specialties. That's why I think genetics should form a much bigger component of medical studies.

How is the web relevant to geneticists?

Being up to date is key. Genetics is typically a field where you have to read dozens of articles every day. Then you need to be open to new developments. Many aspects of genetics are uncharted, and I'm totally convinced that some breakthroughs in the near future will change the way we see genetics today. A modern geneticist must be proficient in Web 2.0: genetic searches, databases, scientific community sites (like biowizard.com), really simple syndication (RSS), and podcasts. In a dynamically changing field like genetics, web has a key part in the work.

What advances in genetics do you foresee in the next decade?

I love science fiction, but in medicine I'm realistic. I'm expecting the creation of a universal prenatal and newborn screening system. It's always easier to prevent than to treat. When I was making the blogtutorial with the patient with



Fact file

Name—Bertalan Mesko
Position—Medical student, University of Debrecen, Hungary
Biography—Administrator and coordinator of the medical projects of the English language Wikipedia. His medical blog, Scinceroll (<http://scinceroll.com>), received a special mention in Medgadget's weblog awards in 2007

Pompe disease, I realised that there was a lag of two to three years between the appearance of the first symptoms and the diagnosis. I dream about a future where people often use genetic counselling, and where most of the known and common genetic diseases are screened. As a dreamer, I'd like to know the number of human genes, the role of all the RNA subtypes, and the hereditary details of multifactorial diseases. Personalised genetics will rule the next decade for sure.

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Further information

- Medgadget (www.medgadget.com/archives/2007/01/2006_medical_we.html)
- Technorati (<http://technorati.com/about/>)—Technorati is currently tracking 74.3 million blogs
- iHealthBeat (www.ihealthbeat.org/index.cfm?action=dsplItem&itemID=129182)

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