

# ReviewWWs

## with CyberDoc

### Viagra

In direct contrast to the issue of 'not for resuscitation' orders which we reviewed last time, Viagra has a host of web pages. The reason for this is of course obvious - Viagra is big news. The Internet is in many ways a huge newspaper. So with the opposite problem facing us, I thought it would be helpful to take you on a guided tour of our attempt to gather information on the ethical implications of this new drug, and the media (and Internet!) hype there has been about it.



To make things easier, I have gathered all the search engines we will use together at <http://search.xtn.org/engines.htm>. You are welcome to use that page for any other search you want. Search engines are the nearest thing to an index that the Internet has.

We begin with *Northern Light*. A simple search for the word 'viagra' leads to more than 25,000 sites. There are some useful links on the first page, but none of them cater for our enquiry. After adding the word 'ethics' 258 sites were returned, and 28 when 'Christian' was added to this. Unfortunately none of these seem relevant. The clever system that this engine uses to categorise the hits does not work well for this query, nor on this occasion does the fact that many of the pages need to be paid for. Both of these things make *Northern Light* useful for a more specific search, but you can't win them all.

Moving onto *Yahoo*, which is one of the best known search engines on the Internet, the results were much more helpful and

included an American Government information page and the surprisingly useful [www.viagra.com](http://www.viagra.com) from Pfizer itself. The Pfizer site contained some very useful information for both patients and doctors. Unfortunately there was no mention of ethics, and *Yahoo*, whilst giving us useful background information on the drug did not help us more directly.

*Alta Vista* surprised me. Previously I have liked this engine, but instead of narrowing the search, adding 'ethics' actually increased the number of page hits from 60,000 to 1,000,000! I presumed that a recent change was the reason, and moved swiftly on after unsuccessfully trying to narrow the search by other means.

The meta-search engine *Verio* works by submitting simultaneously to several search engines and pooling the results. Looking for 'viagra ethics' found a CNN page at <http://cnn.com/HEALTH/bioethics/9807/viagra.cost/index.html> which made some excellent points. This page pointed out that if we could find a pill to restore paraplegics' legs for even a few minutes we would expect health care to pay. Is sex any different? Although written from a US perspective this does have implications for the ethics of the UK's refusal to fund Viagra on the NHS. Are we right to deprive the poor of sex?

*Hotbot* topped its results page with a link to the Starr report on Clinton's sexual activity. Interestingly, the Internet has played a vital role in this whole affair to the point that without the gossip found on one particular site it seems unlikely that the story would ever have been released. A case of the Internet making the news perhaps? It certainly has nothing to do with Viagra, however.

Also, at the top of the page was a banner with a direct link to where the drug could be purchased by mail order. I am not sure of the legality of this and I am sure most Christian doctors would be concerned that people could simply buy a new drug, which may be potentially lethal if used by those with angina, that easily.

Using another meta-search engine, *Inference*, gave a better classification of results and showed its worth as a starting point for any search. Sadly no ethics pages were found and the addition of the word 'ethics' merely brought to the top of the list one of the many pages selling Viagra on line.

So we found very little in the hype about the ethics of such a drug being marketed in such a way and then being denied to those who cannot afford it. Perhaps it is time for Christian health professionals to consider this seriously and make our views known? It cannot be right to raise hopes unrealistically, and create a market which the NHS then refuses to fund. The refusal seems strange in the light of the fact that other, more expensive treatments for impotence are available already on the NHS. The saddest outcome of all this is surely for the many who genuinely need the drug who will now be denied it.



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