HON Code Overview

What was it?

A code of conduct written by a not-for-profit group of health specialists in Europe called Health on the Net in 1996. If the website was approved, it displayed the following symbol with the year that they were certified:

What were their goals?

- To check health and medical websites to see if they are honest and not trying to trick you into spending money for a particular service or product.
- To make sure the information is reliable and based on evidence.

What are the principles of HONCode?

1. Authority
   - Does the website show who wrote the information and advice?
2. Complementarity
   - Does it say why they made the website (to share or to sell)?
   - Does it say who they are trying to reach (children, adults, doctors)?
3. Privacy
   - Does it say how they will use your data/personal information after you finish using the website?
4. Attribution
   - Does it say where do they get their information?
   - Does it say when their information was written to see how old it is?
5. Justifiability
   - Is all the information shown equally?
6. Transparency
   - Does it give contact information for the people responsible for the website?
   - Does it show who to contact if something is wrong on the website?
7. Financial Disclosure
   a. Does it say who pays to keep the website online?
   b. Does it say if the authors work for specific companies that benefit from it?

8. Advertising Policy

   a. Does it indicate what content is health/medical information and what is an advertisement?

Please Note: The HONCode certification on a website does not mean that the group checked the actual information. It shows that the site respects the principles of providing truthful information. The organisation stopped giving out certifications in 2022 and their website was decommissioned on December 15, 2022.

For more information about HONCode, please scroll down.

More Information about HONCode

From their website ([www.hon.ch)](www.hon.ch) and accessed October 26, 2022:

The **Health On the Net Foundation (HON)** was born in May 1996, during the beginning of the World Wide Web, from a collective decision by health specialists, guided by the late Professor Jean-Raoul Scherrer, and under the impetus of former Geneva State Councilor Guy-Olivier Segond.

Because the Internet is a free space that everyone shares, a search for quality information is like a shot in the dark: neither will reliably hit their target. Health On the Net Foundation's origins go back to the September 1995 meeting on the *Use of the Internet and World-Wide Web for Telematics in Healthcare*, when some of the world's foremost experts on telemedicine gathered in Geneva, Switzerland. The visionary experts who created HON anticipated the need for trustworthy health information online.

Thus, HON was created to promote the deployment of useful and reliable health information online and to enable its appropriate and efficient use. Two decades on, the HONcode is the oldest and most valued quality marker for online health information. It is a pragmatic solution that has been adopted by more than 8,000 websites. HON is a not-for-profit international foundation and non-governmental organization.

At HON, we work to develop realistic and applicable solutions related to our mission: "to promote the effective and reliable use of the new technologies for telemedicine in healthcare around the world." Over the past two decades, we have identified two main challenges for which we develop schemes, conduct research activities to use on pragmatic and concrete services, and collaborate with other entities on multiple projects:

1. how to discern reliable health content; (certification)
2. how to provide access to trustworthy resources. (tools)

HON has been granted consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). This status facilitates relations with United Nations bodies, including special relations with the World Health Organization (WHO), and reinforces our consultative role with government ministries in several countries where HON has contacts.

HON also holds the status of "Liaison A" to the Health Informatics Technical Committee (ISO/TC 215) of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). This status allows us to contribute to the elaboration of standards developed by ISO/TC 215, particularly in the domains of data structure, semantic content and security.

From the Wikipedia entry (Accessed October 26, 2022 - because they are no longer available on the HONCode website itself!)

HONCode Principles

1. Authority – information and advice given only by medical professionals with credentials of author/s, or a clear statement if this is not the case
2. Complementarity – information and help are to support, not replace, patient-healthcare professional relationships which is the desired means of contact
3. Confidentiality – how the site treats personal and non-personal information of readers

4. Attribution – references to source of information (URL if available) and when it was last updated
5. Justifiability – any treatment, product or service must be supported by balanced, well-referenced scientific information
6. Transparency of authorship – contact information, preferably including email addresses, of authors should be available
7. Transparency of sponsorship – sources of funding for the site
8. Honesty in advertising and editorial policy – details about advertising on the site and clear distinction between advertised and editorial material