



By Jacob Casey

Becoming a **NURSING INFOVORE** with RSS feeds

What Is An Infovore and Why Would I Want to be One?

In 2006, two neuroscientists (Irving Biederman and Edward Vessel) added an interesting new word to the English lexicon: infovore (New Scientist, 2006). Breaking the word down to roots, one would conclude that an infovore is one who consumes information. Of course, everyone consumes information, but an infovore is more than that. An infovore digests and absorbs vast amounts of information. A nursing infovore is someone with a ravenous

hunger for nursing information, striving to always better his or her practice and technique.

In a fast moving field like nursing, it is important to stay up to date with information regarding new research, improved techniques, and best practice. However, numerous studies have shown that the vast majority of nurses do not regularly read nursing journals that apply to their field. This is not for lack of information; volumes of relevant information are published every month in all manner of journals, magazines, and mailing lists that cover every conceivable specialty.

When questioned about this, most nurses cite lack of time as the primary reason that they do not regularly study nursing literature. The problem is information overload. If a nurse attempted to read the immense amount of nursing information published each month, he or she would soon recognize a lesson in futility. The trick is to not merely seek relevant information, but to make that information come to you. This is what separates the infovore from the overburdened amateur. One way to accomplish this is using RSS feeds.



What Are RSS Feeds and Why Would I Want to Use Them?

Nurses and students alike regularly use the internet for both leisure and research but are unaware that countless websites feature RSS feeds. RSS stands for *Really Simple Syndication*. RSS is the result of programmers and engineers working together to solve a common problem: how can someone process more information in less time? RSS allows updated and important information to be sent directly to you rather than you having to search for it. Using RSS can help registered nurses and student nurses, stay on top of the latest information with minimal effort and the least possible time consumption.

There are many idiosyncrasies related to RSS feeds, but they are by and large unimportant. On the sites you subscribe to you may see things like RSS 2.0, RSS 1.0, Atom, or Feedburner. It does not necessarily matter if you understand what these are; it's simply a matter of subscribing. This is where the beauty of RSS lies: point-and-click subscriptions. An astute infovore can use his or her

RSS reader (also called a “feed aggregator”) to review weeks’ worth of information in minutes.

What Is an RSS Reader and How Do I Choose the Right One?

There are hundreds of RSS readers. Some are top of the line, some are very minimalist; most are simple to use, and most are free. There are two basic kinds of RSS readers: client software and web-based readers. On the client software side, for example, Microsoft Outlook 2007 has an RSS reader built right in, as do internet browsers like Safari (by Apple) and Firefox (by Mozilla). If none of those suit your fancy, you can download any one of the hundreds of alternatives. There are also numerous web-based RSS readers: Yahoo!, Google, and Ask.com all host their own version.

In choosing a reader you simply want to ask yourself what works best for you. If you use Microsoft Outlook on the same computer every day, and would like to get your RSS feeds at the same time you check your email, using the Microsoft Outlook built-in RSS reader may be the way to go for

you. If you use many different computers in many locations, an online reader is probably your best option.

The advantage of an online reader is that it can be utilized from any computer that has internet access. Some of the better online readers have mobile phone functionality so that you can review feeds while away from your computer. These online readers scan the feeds for you and store the information online; all you need to do is log in. Although there are numerous online RSS readers with large followings, two of the best and most popular are Google Reader (www.google.com/reader) and Bloglines (www.bloglines.com).

I've Picked an RSS Reader, Now What?

When you've chosen your favorite RSS reader, the next step is to fill it up with relevant and useful nursing subscriptions. There are a million feeds such as: joke of the day, word of the day, cat picture of the day, funny quote of the day, and many others. While these may be lighthearted and entertaining, the goal is to save time, not waste it. Play around for a while and determine what balance of study and irrelevance works best for you.

A simple web search for the string “Nursing RSS Feeds” will produce a list of feeds from numerous respected nursing organizations, journals, and publications. There are many online feed directories; the most useful directories include a subscriber count, a description of each feed, and search functions. The Google Reader directory is well laid out and very intuitive; simply type the kind of feed you want to subscribe to in the directory search bar and see what's popular. For example, a search for “nursing” returns numerous popular and active feeds, and more detailed searches like “critical care nursing” or “trauma nursing” also produce useful hits. The unique aspect of the Google Reader feed directory is the presence of bundles. There are many well thought out

bundles of subscriptions you can add with a single click. Although there is not currently a nursing bundle, there are bundles for Medicine, Health, Pharmacology, Psychology, Bioinformatics, Healthcare, Neuroscience, and Research, just to name a few.

Finding Even More RSS Feeds

Many websites contain RSS feeds even if they aren't listed in the directories. For example, the *Journal of Research in Nursing* maintains RSS feeds at <http://jrn.sagepub.com/rss> and the Medgadget blog maintains a feed at www.medgadget.com/atom.xml. Many web browsers seek out web feeds and will use a small icon to alert you when the page you are viewing has an RSS feed available.

Some of the better periodical databases such as Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL) on EBSCO will allow you to subscribe to a search string. For example, if you entered a string for "critical care nursing" or "Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*" you could subscribe to the search RSS feed by clicking the orange RSS feed icon. Each time a new scholarly article on the subject is uploaded, you will be one of the first to know. This is a great way to stay at the forefront in your chosen specialty.

Keeping it All Under Control

Remember, this is an endeavor to save time and increase your nursing knowledge base. Don't be afraid to

remove feeds that you feel are a waste of your time; but at the same time, don't be afraid to try new feeds on a trial basis. There is no ideal number of feeds to have, nor are there feeds that every student nurse must have. Like subscribing to journals or magazines, try to find the ones that give you the maximum amount of utility from the lowest amount of reading. If you find yourself shifting through page after page of junk, you may quickly become discouraged.

There is also no ideal schedule for checking your feeds. You may want to check them once a day in the morning, or late at night before bed. You may read a few feeds on study breaks, or you may check them several times a day, reading one or two entries at a time as they appear. Don't be afraid to skim through posts and mark the ones that are of interest for later reading; almost all the feed readers support this function. Also, do not be afraid to walk away for a few days or weeks as schedules demand. Any new postings will be there waiting for you when you get time.

Remember, the whole purpose of using RSS is so that you can read a few articles each day as opposed to hours of intense research on an infrequent basis. These are the tricks of the trade for a nursing infovore. Go forth and devour information; become an expert in your field. You can research without effort and put that information into practice. Don't put in work for the technology; make the technology work for you. ☺

references

New Scientist (2006). "The Word: Infovore." Retrieved March 6, 2009 from <http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg19125612.200-the-word-infovore.html>



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RSS Glossary

aggregator - An aggregator is a program used to collect and read RSS feeds. An RSS aggregator may also be known as a newsreader, news aggregator, or RSS aggregator.

Atom - Atom is an XML-based file format used to syndicate content. Atom is functionally nearly identical to RSS in terms of providing a feed for a subscription.

channel - A channel is a group of items, each of which represents one post. Channel is used interchangeably with feed on many websites.

chicklet - Chicklet is a slang term for the small, often orange buttons used as links for RSS files to easily add a subscription.

feed - An XML file that is meant to be read by an aggregator. A feed may also be called a channel.

news feed - A news feed is a Web feed that specifically supplies new headlines or posts to an RSS aggregator. See "RSS feed."

podcast - A podcast is an audio file published on the Internet with an RSS feed, allowing users to subscribe to automatic downloads.

RSS - RSS (RDF Site Summary, also called Rich Site Summary or Really Simple Syndication) is a method of describing news or other web content that is available for "feeding" from an online publisher to web users.

RSS feed - An RSS feed is an XML file that provides content or summaries of content, including links to the full versions of the content and other metadata, that a user can subscribe to using an RSS aggregator. Some sites may call an RSS feed a channel.

XML - XML (Extensible Markup Language) is a flexible way to create common information formats and share both the format and the data on the World Wide Web, intranets and elsewhere.

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