



Letter to the Editor

Is it really epilepsy? Accuracy of images and videos conveying epilepsy-related information in Wikipedia



To the Editor

Wikipedia is an online free encyclopedia based on collaboration by volunteers who create and edit its articles. It is sought everyday by thousands of people to obtain information on health-related issues, including epilepsy [1]: as of 24th April 2019, the English Wikipedia article on “epilepsy” had been viewed 64,880 times in the past 30 days [2]. Besides readability [3], the accuracy of information conveyed through Wikipedia is a major issue and source of concern, particularly for health-related information. However, so far, no study has evaluated the accuracy of information on epilepsy avail-

able in Wikipedia. In the English Wikipedia article on “epilepsy” [2], some of the images and videos chosen to illustrate the text appear to be inaccurate and misleading. One picture allegedly depicting “A still image of a generalized seizure” (Fig. 1) is actually taken from the famous book “Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière” [4], where it was used to illustrate a patient with a hysterical fit (“Attaque: Periode Epileptoïde”); of note, the source of the picture and its reference to hysteria is correctly acknowledged. One further figure showing “A bite to the tip of the tongue due to a seizure” gives the reader the inaccurate impression that this kind of lesion is typically encountered after an epileptic seizure, whereas it is actually not [5]. A short video is also provided; it gives clear and concise information on how to help someone having a convulsive seizure. However, the label is vague (“An instructional video about epileptic seizures”), and the content is in Spanish, without English subtitles, making the information rather ineffective.

The use of images and videos has been advocated to enhance the medical information provided by Wikipedia, by improving the reader's comprehension [3]. Further efforts should be made to increase the overall quality of epilepsy-related information conveyed through Wikipedia, paying more attention to the accuracy and effectiveness of the images and videos accompanying the text. In this regard, the recent joint collaboration between Wikipedia and the International League Against Epilepsy (ILAE) is welcomed and will hopefully succeed in providing “the most authoritative and up-to-date information on epilepsy” [6] in an effective and accurate way.

Conflicts of interest

No funding was received related to the preparation of this article.

Francesco Brigo has received travel support from Eisai and acted as consultant for Eisai and LivaNova. Simona Lattanzi has no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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Fig. 1. Figure used in the English Wikipedia article on “Epilepsy” allegedly showing “A still image of a generalized seizure” but actually illustrating a patient with a hysterical fit. The picture was originally published in “Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière: service de M. Charcot/par Bourneville et P. Regnard. Volume 1. Paris, 1878” and was meant to depict the “epiloid period” of hysterical seizures “Attaque: Periode Epileptoïde”. Picture reproduced from <https://wellcomecollection.org> (public domain image: CC BY 4.0).

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26 April 2019