

DR. PHO'S LOG KEEPS THOUSANDS IN THE KNOW

By JOHN COLLINS, The Broadcaster



Dr. Kevin Pho, a Nashua physician and internal medicine specialist, runs one of the top medical blogs in the country, drawing 170,000 visits a month to his Web site replete with medical updates and commentary.

NASHUA—Given that the topic of conversation is medical controversies and the can of soda is sitting right there on the table, the reporter's next question for Dr. Kevin Pho, a primary-care physician and internal medicine specialist who operates one of the top 10 medical blogs in the country, seems a "natural" one—concerning the unnatural key ingredients in that can of Diet Coke.

Does aspartame really weaken your memory or cause other side effects? Dr. Pho is asked.

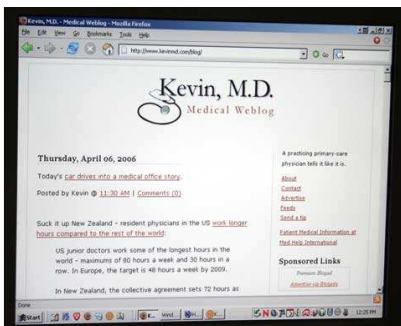
"You know, I've read similar (bad) things too like that on the Internet and I drink a lot of Diet Coke, too," answered Pho (pronounced Poe). "But as far as I know there are no studies to support that. But that's what makes medicine so dynamic. Some of the study findings from 20 years ago no longer hold true today. If you look at hormonal therapy in post-menopausal women, for example."

It just the kind of hot topic that Pho does take a look at—and invites about 6,000 daily and 170,000 monthly visitors to his www.kevinmd.com/blog to also look at and discuss—as he has since founding his medical cyber journal almost two years ago.

Since 2004, his blog has been written up in the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *British Medical Journal*. It has attracted, unsolicited, the sponsorship of three business from the medial field that provide Dr. Pho with just enough cash to cover the operating costs of his site.

It has now become part of the Toronto native and Boston University Medical School grad's daily routine to sign onto and/or update his blog at least three times daily, beginning when he first gets up in the morning.

"I scan the news constantly for interesting stories, new studies, interesting medical controversies. I'll give my opinion lots of times on whatever breaks during the day. I think the best example was when Vioxx was recalled."



Dr. Kevin Pho's running commentaries and medical updates have created a large and loyal following.
BROADCASTER/ANDREA RUNKEL

A lot of patients called his office on the day when Merck's anti-arthritis wonder pill, Vioxx, was cited for triggering possible heart attacks. "A lot of patients called my office saying, what do I do? One of the strengths of the blog is that it can be dynamically updated as news happens, including with your opinions on the news."

He emphasizes that you'll never find any references to the patients he sees in his practice at Nashua Medical Group. What you will find posted are numerous hot-button articles and opinions on such consistently controversial medical topics as malpractice-insurance reform, the big cost of prescription drugs as long waits to see a doctor in hospital emergency rooms.

"A lot of people don't have a primary-care doctor, so they go to the emergency room for primary care. That can

clog up the system for true emergency-room cases. A lot of people aren't aware of that. All they know is they're waiting three, four, or five hours in the emergency room to see a doctor and they want to know why and get upset."

Empowered by their anonymity in most cases, Pho said doctors, nurses, lawyers and patients are free to "tell it like it really is" concerning the health-care system in this country.

"There is a pretty passionate group that comment regularly on my blog on the articles that I post or the options I write," said Pho, who seems especially peeved at the no-ceiling limit on medical malpractice lawsuits that have caused many aspiring doctors to steer clear of the more lawsuit-happy area of the medical profession, such as obstetrics/gynecology.

"There are a lot of lawyers who disagree with what I say on malpractice issues, which draws a lot of doctors who come on to take my side. It's a forum for debate and opinion and it allows me to maybe clarify some misinterpretations of breaking medical news by the (mainstream) media."

By generating healthy debate on these and others controversial topics—such as the increasingly high frequency of C-section births, for example—Pho hopes to bring attention to these issues "and hopefully bring about change for the better as a result."

Considering the multiple demands on his time from work, family and the upkeep of his blog., it's no surprise that he has precious little time to spend watch TV, even a heavily viewed medical drama like *House* or the popular cable TV "reality" series about a plastic surgeon titled *Dr. 90210*. But not having the time to watch those shows doesn't stop him from posting interesting news articles about them to spark more discussion on his site.

"*The New York Times* did a good article a couple of weeks ago on the surgeon featured on *Dr. 90210*, about how over-the-top glamorous it is, and showing the doctor surrounded by all these women. After I posted that article, it generated some really interesting comments among my bloggers"

How much longer does the doctor foresee himself hosting the blog?

"The day it becomes a chore is when I might stop," said Pho.

"But as long as I find it enjoyable and can find reward in it, I'll keep (hosting) it. And right now I do."