Free Open Access Meducation (FOAM): the rise of emergency medicine and critical care blogs and podcasts (2002–2013)

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ABSTRACT
Disruptive technologies are revolutionising continuing professional development in emergency medicine and critical care (EMCC). Data on EMCC blogs and podcasts were gathered prospectively from 2002 through November 2013. During this time there was a rapid expansion of EMCC websites, from two blogs and one podcast in 2002 to 141 blogs and 42 podcasts in 2013. This paper illustrates the explosive growth of EMCC websites and provides a foundation that will anchor future research in this burgeoning field.

BACKGROUND
Over the past decade the number of medical websites has exploded. Their use in medical education has been documented in the literature,1,2 and they could play a prominent role in facilitating the type of ‘flipped classroom’ education recently described in Academic Medicine.3,4 Emergency medicine and critical care (EMCC) have led the way in the explosive growth of these resources.2 However, to date there have been no epidemiological or research publications documenting this phenomenon.

With 11 million views from 5.8 million visitors each year, Life in the Fast Lane5 has been one of the most prominent EMCC blogs since it was founded in 2007. Its cofounder (MC) prospectively indexed observational data on EMCC blogs and podcasts from 2002 through 2013. This descriptive report outlines the growth of these websites.

RESULTS
As of November 2013, 141 blogs and 42 podcasts were identified on 183 EMCC websites. The number of active blogs and podcasts in November 2013 is shown in figure 1 along with data collected prospectively from 2002 through November 2012. The retrospective Google search identified an additional nine blogs and one podcast for inclusion.

DISCUSSION
Online digital resources are playing an integral role in the disruption of medical education.3 Blogs and podcasts have become increasingly popular...
platforms for teaching and learning, as evidenced by their continued growth in the EMCC field.

The major limitation of this study is our data collection method which relied to a degree on Google’s evolving proprietary search algorithms and self-reporting. This effect was addressed by comparing our results with a prospectively collected database over nearly 12 years. This limitation would underestimate the prevalence and growth of blogs and podcasts.

With the explosion of online EMCC content, future research should focus on information curation, quality metrics and impact analysis for EMCC website content. The effective development of tools for these purposes will be crucial in shaping their future role in medical education.

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Data sharing statement The raw data used in this analysis including all FOAM websites may be made available to interested parties for research purposes at the discretion of MC.

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