

## Editorial

### **Repropedia: A Reproductive Lexicon to Fill the Gap in Reproductive Terminology<sup>1</sup>**

The general public and students have incomplete comprehension of reproductive science terminology. This lack of knowledge creates barriers to discussions about reproductive biology and health and makes health care decision-making difficult. To address this need, the Specialized Cooperative Centers Program in Reproduction and Infertility at Northwestern University, the Center for Reproductive Research, created *Repropedia* ([repropedia.org](http://repropedia.org)), a website that is curated by members of the global reproductive science community and that serves as an authoritative source of definitions for reproductive health terms. Importantly, this site provides pop-up definition boxes that can be used to directly interact with any other website. This technology ensures that the readers get the information in context and do not have to leave their website of interest. By creating and actively participating in *Repropedia*, the reproductive science community is becoming active in the dissemination of knowledge and ensuring that the next generation of learners has an information resource that is suited to their learning environment.

Health literacy is critically important to understand reproductive health as it relates to one's self and one's family as well as to scientific discoveries and interventions, such as in vitro fertilization, contraception, and testicular sperm extraction [1]. However, The World Wide Web contains surprisingly few resources where people can access reproductive health and science definitions that are both peer-reviewed and easily digestible. *Wikipedia* is frequently used to find definitions, but the public can easily manipulate its contents and the information available is often lengthy and complex. Websites with accurate reproductive health and science information exist, but they can be difficult to find. Perhaps most disturbingly, keyword searches via *Google* or *Yahoo!* can often lead to sites that are

unsavory or inappropriate, especially for adolescents [2]. Moreover, reproductive terms are often associated with cultural epithets and jokes, making even a casual interest/curiosity in authoritative definitions hard to fulfill because of this association. These barriers can result in low reproductive health literacy as well as unhealthy choices due to a lack of understanding about key biological processes. *Repropedia* is a comprehensive, reproductive-focused, online lexicon that was created to address these needs and increase public literacy in the fields of reproductive health and science.

*Repropedia* requires the active engagement of the reproductive health and science community. We need leaders in this community to contribute definitions and review existing entries. An editorial board, encompassing experts from across the United States and around the world, has been established ([repropedia.org/editorial-board](http://repropedia.org/editorial-board)). This board meets remotely, using the Vidyo system, a desktop-based application for personal videoconferencing and data sharing. In so doing, we have expanded the community of practice to ensure that the best information is collated into this public site. *Repropedia* will be stronger if the reproductive science community views it as a community asset and a worthwhile effort. Thus, we invite all members of the reproductive health and science community who have an interest in reproductive health literacy to participate.

The most recent update of *Repropedia* included a new resource that makes the site even more useful to Internet users. The current online lexicon was created in Drupal 7, the latest version of the Drupal content management system, which fully implements the semantic web and exposed web services. This means websites that choose to interact with *Repropedia* can automatically harvest any word that is listed, and that word will be automatically underlined and hyperlinked. Unlike manual linking, the word and its definition appear in a pop-up window in the website, blog, or Twitter feed so that the user can easily understand terms that are vague or unfamiliar without leaving the reading domain (Supplemental Fig. S1;

all Supplemental Data are available online at [www.biolreprod.org](http://www.biolreprod.org)). As social media become the main avenue for communication, this feature allows the public to easily understand information communicated in short blog entries and Twitter feeds. We invite you to see examples by visiting the Oncofertility Consortium blog ([blog.oncofertility.northwestern.edu](http://blog.oncofertility.northwestern.edu)) or Twitter feed ([twitter.com/oncofertility](https://twitter.com/oncofertility)), the Institute for Women's Health Research blog ([blog.womenshealth.northwestern.edu](http://blog.womenshealth.northwestern.edu)) or Twitter feed ([twitter.com/WomensHealthNU](https://twitter.com/WomensHealthNU)), or the Oncofertility Consortium home page (<http://oncofertility.northwestern.edu>).

With the help of the worldwide reproductive science and health community, our goal is to see *Repropedia* continue to evolve and grow so that authoritative and lay-friendly definitions can be developed for teaching the public. The website is not meant to be static; the editorial board welcomes feedback and ideas for improvement. In addition to suggesting words and definitions, scientists and clinicians can contribute images from their own work or request to submit a video clip for a particular term. *Repropedia* provides the opportunity for the international reproductive science and health community to work together to educate the public (Supplemental Fig. S2).

By integrating a range of the stakeholder groups—research scientists, educators, students, and the public—we feel we can advance our field in significant ways, whether personally, professionally, and politically. The public sphere has many voices that use reproductive health terms without a fundamental knowledge of what these terms actually mean. The reproductive science community can fill these gaps by becoming active participants in this community engagement resource.

—Cathryn Smeyers, Harlan Wallach,  
and Teresa K. Woodruff,  
Northwestern University,  
Chicago, Illinois

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editorial board member and submit suggestions, visit [reproedia.org](http://reproedia.org). A comprehensive web Application Programming Interface (API) is currently in development. The API will allow others in the reproductive health and science community to integrate the *Reproedia* lexicon into their own websites. If interested, please register at <http://reproedia.org/api-subscribe>.

All who register will be alerted when the web API becomes available.

### REFERENCES

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy. Washington, DC; 2010.
2. Jones RK, Biddlecom AE. Is the Internet filling the sexual health information gap for teens? An exploratory study. *J Health Commun* 2011; 16(2):112–123.