

# SIGIR 2018 Tutorial on Health Search (HS2018)

A Full-day from Consumers to Clinicians

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## ABSTRACT

The HS2018 tutorial will cover topics from an area of information retrieval (IR) with significant societal impact – health search. Whether it is searching patient records, helping medical professionals find best-practice evidence, or helping the public locate reliable and readable health information online, health search is a challenging area for IR research with an actively growing community and many open problems. This tutorial will provide attendees with a full stack of knowledge on health search, from understanding users and their problems to practical, hands-on sessions on current tools and techniques, current campaigns and evaluation resources, as well as important open questions and future directions.

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## 1 MOTIVATION AND OVERVIEW

With modern medicine increasingly reliant on information technology, the demand for IR systems that search medical content has grown significantly. The increasing need to retrieve medical advice (by both consumers and clinicians), and the adoption of electronic medical records are two factors driving the demand for health search. IR research has much to offer here by developing new tools and techniques specific to this domain [18].

The range of health information available (primary research sources, secondary research sources, patient records, web pages and popular publications, etc.), plus the range of end users (health consumers, different clinicians – general practitioners, specialists, researchers, etc.), and the range of tasks (searching evidence-based-medicine literature [40], searching patient records and cohort selection [55], searching for medical advice on the Web [66], searching the literature for drug-drug interactions and co-morbidities [9], searching for clinical trials [25], searching literature to form systematic reviews [20], etc.) all leads to complex requirements that often require novel solutions to these different problems.

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The key challenge in health search is how to bridge the *semantic gap*: the mismatch between the raw data and the way a human being interprets it. Although particularly prevalent in health search, the semantic gap problem is found in all domains [1]; advances in health search can thus advance the whole field. Key challenges include: how to leverage semantics and domain-knowledge resources for a better representation of documents and information needs [27]; what characterises relevance, in particular how topicality is complemented by other dimensions of relevance [64] (understandability, authoritativeness, etc.), how bias and time pressure affect perception of relevance and decisions [34, 39, 60] and how these influences the search process and evaluation.

Advances in health search will require familiarity with the tasks, users, successes, failures, and domain-specific resources. This tutorial will introduce researchers to the challenges and opportunities in health search, providing insights into current techniques and their results. It will also offer a hands-on overview of tools specific to the health domain made available by the clinical informatics and natural language processing communities.

This tutorial also draws on complementary efforts from other computer science fields in the health domain. Efforts from the clinical informatics and natural language processing communities have produced a wide array of tools that can dovetail with IR techniques. High quality domain knowledge resources (e.g., the UMLS<sup>1</sup> meta-thesaurus and SNOMED CT ontology<sup>2</sup>) have been developed to encode medical knowledge – these can be used for reasoning and inference within IR techniques [27, 65]. Natural language processing resources that identify medical concepts (from the aforementioned domain-knowledge resources) from free text have been developed (e.g., Metamap [5]). Similar tools have been created to extract other information from medical documents, such as negations, assertions and medications [16, 56]. The tutorial will provide hands-on demonstrations of how these tools and techniques can be exploited by IR systems.

IR has a long history of rigorous empirical evaluation; this is also the case in health search. This tutorial will cover topics specific to health search evaluation: available test collections, evaluation resources, evaluation campaigns (TREC, CLEF, etc.), as well as insights on successes, failures and difficulties encountered.

## 2 OBJECTIVES

The main aims of HS2018 will be to:

- (1) Summarise the basics of search in the health domain;
- (2) Present the different end user requirements for multiple user groups interested in health search, including tasks;

<sup>1</sup><https://www.nlm.nih.gov/research/umls/>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.snomed.org/snomed-ct>

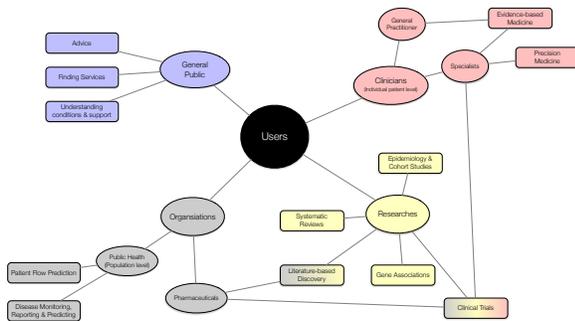


Figure 1: Search tasks and user types considered in HS2018.

- (3) Provide an overview of the current use of IR techniques in the health domain;
- (4) Provide a hands-on introduction to domain-specific tools which can be exploited in health search;
- (5) Present resources and campaigns for evaluation in health search, including novel evaluation approaches;
- (6) Present challenges and opportunities for further research in the health domain and discuss how these could be met.

This knowledge will allow IR researchers to identify promising ways of applying their work to the health domain, allowing them to contribute to a domain of rapidly growing importance.

### 3 FORMAT AND SCHEDULE

#### 3.1 Session 1: Background and theory

##### Introduction to the health domain and to the tutorial

The tutorial begins with an introduction to IR in health, giving an overview of the topics that will be covered in the tutorial and why they are important.

**Duration: 15m**

##### Types of health information

Health information comes in a myriad of forms. This section covers the characteristics of different types of health information sources important for health search. These range from patient-based information (e.g., electronic health records), knowledge-based information (e.g., scientific papers), through to consumer-based information (e.g., patient forums on the web). Also included are sources of domain knowledge such as medical ontologies, terminologies and classification systems, all of which are playing an increasingly important role in state-of-the-art IR systems.

**Duration: 30m**

##### End users and tasks

An analysis of the end user (from consumer [10, 61, 66] to clinician [37, 53]) characteristics and tasks in health search is presented. Some groups of end users are addressed, and the information needs and search tasks they undertake are described: examples of users and search tasks are listed in Figure 1.

**Duration: 45m**

#### 3.2 Session 2: Techniques and methods

##### Methods in health search

This section covers the state-of-the-art in health search, summarising the most important research methods and results in this area with respect to the different tasks discussed in the previous session and highlighting common trends across tasks. This session will cover methods across different health search tasks, including: query expansion and reformulation [2, 33, 42, 43, 47, 52, 54, 62, 63], use of domain knowledge and inference mechanisms [12, 15, 26, 27, 30, 44, 65], learning to rank and other learning methods [3, 6, 31, 32, 35, 36, 43, 49–51], task-based information [23, 29], and specifically handling clinical text [7, 8, 17, 22, 24, 28]. We provide examples of health search systems already in use and lessons that can be drawn from their use.

**Duration: 90m**

#### 3.3 Session 3: Practical

##### Use of clinical NLP tools for medical IR: Hands-on session

The clinical informatics and clinical natural language processing community have developed a number of tools for extracting clinical information free text. For example, statistical and dictionary-based named entity recognition systems have been developed to identify medical entities [5, 19, 48]; algorithms have been developed to extract associations, relationships and contexts and to enhance textual content with semantic information [11, 16, 59]. This part of the tutorial presents an overview of such techniques, providing a hands-on demonstration of how these tools work. In addition, the tutorial provides an outlook at how these tools have been used in the literature or can be integrated to enhance information representation and the whole information retrieval process.

**Duration: 90m**

#### 3.4 Session 4: Evaluation and future directions

##### Evaluation

The tasks and challenges in evaluating health search are covered in this section. Evaluation that considers multiple dimensions of relevance (topicality, reliability, understandability [64], bias [60]) is presented. We touch on new frameworks to evaluate systems based on task completion rather than relevance [23]. Evaluation campaigns and resources in this domain are presented, including TREC Medical Records Track [55, 57, 58], TREC Clinical Decision Support Track [40, 41, 46], CLEF eHealth (consumer health search [13, 14, 38, 67] and as of 2017 search systems for the compilation of systematic reviews [20, 45]), i2b2 Shared Task Challenges<sup>3</sup>, ALTA Shared Task (Query-based summarisation for evidence-based medicine) [4], clinical trial retrieval [25], and the use of ICD coded data as an automated relevance judgement mechanism [21].

**Duration: 50m**

<sup>3</sup><https://www.i2b2.org/NLP/>

## Open challenges for health search and conclusions (including discussion)

There are many open problems in health search which are fertile ground for information retrieval (IR) research. Examples include: (i) searching for “similar” anonymised patient records or “similar” medical images within a hospital to assist in diagnosis or treatment; (ii) linking treatment guidelines to patient records based on their content; (iii) searching within a patient record to obtain an overview of someone's medical history. This part of the tutorial briefly presents some of the areas of medicine and consumer-health experience that have a potential to be improved through the use of IR techniques, leading to a discussion with the participants on meeting these challenges.

**Duration: 40m**

## 4 RELEVANCE TO THE IR COMMUNITY

Health related topics have become a common theme within IR. A number of venues, including SIGIR, have workshops, tutorials or tracks dedicated to health search. In recent times, SIGIR has had both tutorials (2012) and workshops (2014 and 2016). Similarly, other venues such as WSDM, WWW, KDD, and ACL have all hosted health related tutorials or workshops, with the most recent being an ECIR 2018 tutorial that focuses on semantic search on medical texts. This shows the interest from the community in health search. Even so, a number of important aspects of health search were never covered and are thus the focus of this tutorial:

- This tutorial will clearly provide an understanding of the users, their information needs, tasks and challenges that exist in this domain. This is critical as many of these differ from other domains.
- Practical sessions will provide attendees with hands-on experience with health search techniques, tools and problems.
- The tutorial will conclude with an analysis of open questions in the domain.

It is our intention to provide attendees with a full stack of knowledge in health search, from understanding the problems, practical solutions and fruitful areas of future work. It is our hope that this will equip them to contribution to an area of growing interest in the field with significant societal impact.

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