

# Thinking about writing for the National Elf Service?

## The Musculoskeletal Elf

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benefit of the immediate recipient hereof.*

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# 1. Introduction

## a. Who is this document for?



This paper is for anyone who shares our commitment to delivering quality-filtered updates of emerging evidence that focus on the needs of health and social care professionals. And also anyone who likes elves!

We are looking for subject specialists, clinicians, researchers, students and information scientists to write blogs for the National Elf Service. Specifically the **Musculoskeletal Elf**, a website aimed at helping health and social care professionals, researchers and students keep up to date with the latest reliable research, policy and guidance relating to musculoskeletal health.

If you want to use your research and writing skills to make a real difference to patient care – read on.

## b. What you will bring

There are a few essentials that you will need to write for the **Musculoskeletal Elf**:

- **Musculoskeletal health knowledge:** you don't need to be a Professor, but you do need to know about musculoskeletal health or a specific health condition or population group within the specialty
- **Critical appraisal skills:** you need to be comfortable reading, appraising and summarising research papers
- **Writing skills:** you need to be able to write in clear, simple and engaging language

## c. Why start a National Elf Service?

We've been working in evidence-based healthcare since the mid-1990s and have been involved in dozens of major web projects that aim to bring the best current knowledge to those who need it most.

It is our belief that health and social care professionals (doctors, nurses, allied health professionals, specialists, social workers, trainees etc.) need to keep up to date with the latest research, policy and guidance in their specialty. This information is essential in order to make accurate decisions about health and social care.

There is good evidence that people are still not getting the information they need. The huge volume of high quality published research means that there is simply too much new information to keep track of<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, a huge volume of irrelevant publications obscures the really good quality and clinically relevant material<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Heneghan C. How many randomized trials are published each year? 17th March 2010  
<http://blogs.trusttheevidence.net/carl-heneghan/how-many-randomized-trials-are-published-each-year>

<sup>2</sup> Ioannidis JPA (2005) Why Most Published Research Findings Are False. PLoS Med 2(8): e124.  
doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.0020124  
<http://www.plosmedicine.org/article/info:doi/10.1371/journal.pmed.0020124>

However, studies show that if health professionals can get access to the right evidence at the right time, they make better decisions and fewer mistakes<sup>3</sup>.

Currently on the Internet, users can subscribe to a bewildering array of newsletters, websites and bibliographic databases such as PubMed. Unfortunately, these only make the problem worse.

Although existing blogs provide frequent updates, they are often too specific and too driven by the agenda of the blogger to serve as a means of updating serious knowledge.

Feeds from databases, journals and organisations exacerbate the problem because there are too many and they are too unfocused. Our studies show that even in the most important journals, over 80% of publications are irrelevant to clinical practice. The situation is even worse for databases: here, a typical saved search in the area of diabetes (for example) yields approximately two relevant items for every 100 hits retrieved.

Social media promises a great deal as a simple and accessible vehicle, but the quality of debate on sites like Twitter is frequently very poor and it takes a significant amount of time to build up the necessary connections to use Twitter to keep up to date.

Our National Elf Service solution is to marry the accessibility and immediacy of blogs and social media with a strict focus on clinical relevance and quality, to create a range of expert health blogs that are user-friendly, engaging and fun!

This approach will save people time and bring them information they would be most unlikely to find by:

- Offering a range of specialty topics to choose from
- Encouraging users to make better use of the evidence because they are aware that they can get at it easily
- Facilitating intelligent debate around the evidence
- Providing a searchable archive

*"Minervation was created to improve the quality of health information. They combine a genuine commitment to methodological rigour with a practical knowledge of how to make it relevant to people's needs."*

- Prof. Guy Goodwin, Head of Department of Psychiatry, University of Oxford

A variety of delivery methods will increase take up:

- Website
- Email newsletter
- Social media
- Mobile apps

This will help people by:

- Keeping the evidence in the foreground of their knowledge
- Ensuring they don't miss any important new publications in their field
- Alerting them to important changes in practice

<sup>3</sup> Badenoch D, De Brun C. Where's the evidence for evidence? Review of abstracts of studies of clinicians' information seeking behaviour. The International Society for Evidence-Based Health Care Newsletter 4, July 2011. <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B7TUcz2K9LnzYmE1MmVhMDgtZWE3NS00M2QwLTk0YWVhZTQ1OGVhZjkwNDY4eDit>

## d. Existing elves

Eight elf blogs have been created so far:

- Commissioning [www.thecommissioningelf.net](http://www.thecommissioningelf.net)
- Dental health: [www.thedentalelf.net](http://www.thedentalelf.net)
- Diabetes: [www.thediabeteself.net](http://www.thediabeteself.net)
- Learning disabilities: [www.welddblog.net](http://www.welddblog.net)
- Mental health: [www.thementalelf.net](http://www.thementalelf.net)
- Healthy lifestyle: [www.thelifestyleelf.net](http://www.thelifestyleelf.net)
- Musculoskeletal health: [www.themusculoskeletaelf.net](http://www.themusculoskeletaelf.net)
- Education [www.educationelf.net](http://www.educationelf.net)

And further blogs are on the way:

- Child health
- Social care
- Stroke

The response to the existing sites has been extremely positive and we are therefore looking to expand into other areas and build up our teams of bloggers in existing topics.

Our model is to have one Chief Blogger (Editor) and a team of bloggers for each elf, so the workload can be shared.

## e. How do the blogs work?

We have used the free open source Wordpress system to launch the existing sites. Each of them is a separate site at present, but these will be brought together into a single database during late 2014 and early 2015.

Each elf topic publishes 1-5 blogs per week; highlighting new evidence identified from a range of trusted sources (filtered database feeds, journals, professional societies, public sector organisations, leading charities etc).

We carefully select evidence for inclusion and favour secondary publication material (e.g. evidence synopses, guidelines, systematic reviews) and high quality primary research (e.g. randomised controlled trials). However, we also recognise that the quality of research in some areas is not yet up to the gold standard, so we include other types of study when we consider them to represent the best available evidence in a specific field.

A complete list of the sources we scan for the Musculoskeletal Elf can be found in the appendix.

*"I have worked with Minervation on a number of national and international projects, in which they have brought immense expertise and professionalism into the important task of disseminating evidence-based information to patients, families, primary care, specialist care, prison staff and policy makers. They produce creative technical solutions to scientific and practical needs and are always a pleasure to work with."*  
- Prof. Rachel Jenkins, Director of WHO Collaborating Centre and Head of Section of Mental Health Policy, Institute of Psychiatry

## f. Design and branding

The aim of the National Elf Service brand is to present a friendly, approachable, upbeat and memorable service that stands out from the crowd in the congested health information market and on social media.

Each Elf should be recognisable and reproducible in a variety of online and paper-based formats, as well as being designed with character animation in mind.

Each Elf will sport an accessory that relates to the topic area, e.g. the Lifestyle Elf carries an apple.



## g. Future plans

We will soon turn our individual Elf websites into an evidence network using Wordpress, which will feature a central database of all content; categorised and tagged to enable easy generation of bespoke feeds for different customers (e.g. a feed on depression and exercise).

We will also be adding website registration, personalisation and other features for paid subscribers, which will enable users to track which blogs they have read and what they have learnt from the evidence. Subscribers will soon get access to interactive online journal clubs and links to online continuing professional development.

We will use gamification techniques to encourage members to gain points and build their profile by participating in online activities, e.g. reading blogs, commenting on blogs, participating in an online members discussion, tweeting about blogs, joining an online journal club, writing blogs etc.

You can read more about our approach to digital innovation and our plans for the National Elf Service here: <http://www.thementalelf.net/populations-and-settings/service-user-involvement/digital-innovation-works-best-when-users-are-involved-at-every-stage/>

## 2. Current team

### a. Minervation staff

André Tomlin  
Managing Director, Minervation  
Chief Blogger for The Mental Elf

Douglas Badenoch  
Director, Minervation  
Chief Blogger for The Diabetes Elf and The Lifestyle Elf

## b. Chief bloggers

Sarah Carr  
Sarah Carr Associates  
The Social Care Elf

Caroline De Brún  
PC De Brún Associates  
The Commissioning Elf

Madeleine Greal  
University of Strathclyde  
The Stroke Elf

Jennifer Hanratty  
Queens University, Belfast  
The Child Elf

**Tracey Howe**  
**Glasgow Caledonian University**  
and  
**Lesley Dawson**  
**NHS Forth Valley**  
**The Musculoskeletal Elf**

John Northfield  
Independent Learning Disabilities Consultant  
The Learning Disabilities Elf

Derek Richards  
Director, Centre for Evidence-Based Dentistry  
The Dental Elf

Leah Tomlin  
Henleaze Junior School, Bristol  
The Education Elf

## c. Business development

Barry Holloway  
Jon Miller  
Digital Strategy & Online Marketing  
Fennario Consulting Ltd

Jonathan Black  
Richard Hardy  
Board Members  
Minervation Ltd

## 3. Skills and values

### a. Ethos

We are applying the Minervation ethos to this project as we do to all digital innovation:

- We always conduct ourselves with honesty and integrity
- We believe in inclusive and open-minded working
- We are passionate lifelong learners
- We strive to take a fresh and original approach to new and existing work

Our aim is to bring together a group of like-minded people to work on this project. We started this process in 2011 by contacting our existing network of associates and colleagues, many of whom have given their time for free to help get new Elf websites off the ground.

We have built on this core team significantly since then by asking PhD Students, Post-docs, Researchers and other Health and Social Care Professionals to get involved in the Mental Elf, which now has a team of over 70 published bloggers from the UK, Ireland, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and a number of other countries.

Our aim is to now apply this same process to the Musculoskeletal Elf by putting together a diverse team of like-minded people to contribute to the website.

### b. Subject knowledge

As an elf blogger, you will require a detailed knowledge of a specific subject area that will be tackled by the blog.

We expect each blogger to specify a number of subject areas of interest, so that we can retrieve relevant research for you to blog about.

For example:

- A musculoskeletal health specialist might state their interests as: Prevention and management of musculoskeletal conditions of the spine (neck and back pain) and peripheral joints (shoulder, elbow, wrist hand, hip, knee, foot and ankle) including fractures, dislocations and soft tissue injuries.

### c. Searching

Literature searching skills are not required for bloggers, as we will find appropriate evidence for you to write about. If you wish, you can also suggest studies for inclusion.

### d. Appraising

Bloggers will need to assess the reliability and applicability of research papers to decide whether or not they should be included in the blog and how they should be summarised.

We recommend using the CASP appraisal checklists for this purpose: <http://www.casp-uk.net>



**It is vital that bloggers feel confident and comfortable in criticising the research they are writing about. It is not sufficient to simply reproduce the conclusions written by the authors of the study. Your job is to highlight weaknesses in the study methodology and reporting and provide an evidence-based summary of the research with a commentary on the strengths and weaknesses, as well as some information about how the research findings could impact on practice.**

## e. Writing/blogging

The main task for each blogger is to write clear, readable and engaging blogs on a regular basis. The frequency of your blogs is something that we can agree in advance, but most contributors write a blog every 6-8 weeks.

Our aim is to put together teams of >20 bloggers for each elf, who will be led by the Chief Blogger and supported by an Information Scientist.

**Reading, appraising, interpreting and summarising research studies are therefore the main skills needed to be involved in this project.**

The blogs should be written for a junior health or social care professional audience in clear, jargon-free English. Health and social care professionals are the primary audience for the website, so we expect clinical language and statistical information to be included in the blogs.

## f. Blog format and length

Most blogs will use the same template structure:

- Background
  - A brief introduction to the subject area
  - Setting the scene
  - Presenting background statistics (incidence, prevalence)
  - Citing other related research
  - Introducing the new evidence that is the focus of the blog
- Methods
  - A brief summary of the methodology of the new evidence
- Results
  - A succinct presentation of the research results
  - Statistical results can be included
  - Complicated data can be tabulated if necessary
- Conclusions
  - A summary of the research conclusions
  - Can include a quote from the study if appropriate
- Strengths and limitations
  - This is where we present our critical appraisal of the evidence
  - This should include the methodological weaknesses of the study
  - It should not simply be a repetition of the limitations highlighted by the researchers themselves in their paper
- Summary
  - The final section is where we relate the evidence to practice:
    - Should this new evidence have an impact on practice?
    - What changes should be made as a result of these new findings?
    - What new research avenues does this evidence open up?
- Links
  - A complete bibliography of all of the evidence cited in the blog

- Starting with the reference for the actual piece of new evidence we are highlighting

Blogs should generally not exceed 1,000 words (excluding the links and references presented at the end).

## 4. The practicalities

### a. Wordpress



We'll train you in using Wordpress so that you are self sufficient in writing, indexing and formatting your blogs. This will include:

- Writing and formatting blogs
- Categorising and tagging blogs
- Adding images
- Uploading documents and adding links
- Responding to comments and feedback

If using Wordpress is really not your thing – fear not! We can add your blog to the website for you. Simply send us your text in Word and we can turn it into an online post.

### b. Credit

You will be identified by name, with a brief biography on the elf website and you will be credited for every blog you write.

### c. Reproducing blogs

You are permitted to post blogs you write for the National Elf Service on other websites, for example your academic research department site. Our contributors from the University of Liverpool Addiction Group have done just this:  
<http://livuniaddictiongroup.blogspot.co.uk/>

If you do reproduce your blogs in this way, we ask that you clearly credit them and provide a link back to the National Elf Service blog.

### d. Review

Your blogs will be submitted for publication and then reviewed by your Chief Blogger, who will ask you to make any necessary changes before the Chief Blogger schedules your blog for publication.

### e. Basecamp

We use a simple online project management system to plan and manage the National Elf Service workload. You will register with this system so you can see papers that are assigned to you and communicate with other members of the team.

## f. Social media

All blogs will be automatically sent out to a variety of social media channels using the Mailchimp Social plug-in for Wordpress. As a minimum, each blog will be expected to feature Twitter and Facebook accounts, but some may also have LinkedIn or Google+ groups or other social media accounts that are specific to the subject area.

Chief Bloggers will spend time cultivating a following on social media by establishing links with key influencers and promoting the National Elf Service brand to health and social care professionals.

Individual Bloggers will be encouraged to have a Twitter account so that they can participate in the discussions that take place following the publication of a blog.

## g. Email account

A dedicated email address will be set up for each blog (e.g. [feedback@themusculoskeletaelf.net](mailto:feedback@themusculoskeletaelf.net)) and this will be used as the main contact point for all blog questions and related accounts. The email address will be forwarded to the Chief Blogger and also to a member of Minervation staff, so that all enquiries can be dealt with between them.

## h. Artwork

Each Elf will be designed with a variety of different views, e.g. front-facing, in profile, pointing etc. These will be used on the blog and across the various media channels and publicity materials.

We will also make use of stock artwork libraries such as Shutterstock ([www.shutterstock.com](http://www.shutterstock.com)) to source appropriate images for inclusion on the blog. It is important that each blog has a number of pictures that are eye-catching, aesthetically pleasing and relevant to the subject of the piece. All bloggers will be given Shutterstock logins to source artwork for their blogs.



## i. Email newsletter

A monthly email newsletter will be sent out from each blog. A sample newsletter can be seen at: <http://us2.campaign-archive2.com/?u=89a101ff4b67d13029846ac93&id=eab0048623>

Each newsletter will be generated from the blogs that have been published in the last month. A short introduction will be created for each newsletter and they will be sent out to subscribers using Mailchimp ([www.mailchimp.com](http://www.mailchimp.com)).

## 5. Relationship with Minervation

### a. Partnership

We are seeking to establish strong long-term partnerships with individuals and organisations who share our vision for health information.

We have been involved in many national and international projects that have tried and sometimes failed to deliver accessible, usable and reliable health updates to the professionals who need them to inform their decision-making. We have learnt that above all else, these products need to be:

- Based on the best available evidence
- Relevant to practice
- Simple to use
- Interesting and engaging
- Focused and not overwhelming

Building relationships around this vision with a group of talented and driven people will remain one of our main challenges for the coming years.

### b. Remuneration

Chief Bloggers will be paid for the work they do. This role is likely to take about half a day per week, so a flat rate will be agreed for this time in advance.

Bloggers who regularly contribute to an Elf website will be rewarded with free membership of the National Elf Service when the subscription service is launched, which equates to a saving of £10 per month. Bloggers will also benefit from a range of training and professional development opportunities that come with working on a project of this nature.

## 6. Are you interested?

We would love to hear from you if you think you have what it takes to join the National Elf Service Musculoskeletal Elf team as a Chief Blogger (Editor) or a contributing Blogger.

Please contact André to discuss next steps:

André Tomlin  
Managing Director, Minervation  
[andre.tomlin@minervation.com](mailto:andre.tomlin@minervation.com)  
Tel: 07974 754352



## Appendix: List of MSK sources

### a. Websites

- Charitable Organisations
  - Arthritis research UK
  - National osteoporosis society UK
  - National Osteoporosis Foundation
  - Arthritis care
  - Arthritic association
  - National rheumatoid arthritis society
  - Children's chronic arthritis association
  - Arthritis and musculoskeletal alliance
  - National ankylosing spondylitis society
  - Arthritis Australia
  - World Arthritis day
  - Fragility fractures network
  - National Bone Health Alliance (USA)
- Professional Organisations
  - Chartered Society of Physiotherapy
  - International Academy of Manual/Musculoskeletal Medicine
  - Society of Orthopaedic Medicine
  - British Society for Rheumatology
  - Osteoarthritis research international
  - World Confederation for Physical therapy
  - Eular
  - APTA (subscription)
  - Trip Database
  - NHS Evidence Health & Social care
  - NICE
  - Musculoskeletal Health Network (AUS)
  - Evidence based practice rehabilitation guidelines
  - Quebec rehabilitation network
  - Australian Rheumatology Association
  - Australian physiotherapy Association
  - PEDro is the Physiotherapy Evidence Database
  - WHO Bone & Joint Decade and
  - Global Alliance for Musculoskeletal Health
  - Cochrane Back group
  - Cochrane Bone joint and muscle trauma group
  - Cochrane musculoskeletal group
  - Cochrane consumers
  - The Journal of Musculoskeletal Medicine
  - Rheumatology pearls
  - Cochrane OSH Group @CochraneOSH
  - Rheumatology Update @rheumaupdate

### b. Journals

- Annals of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine
- Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases
- Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation
- Arthritis & Rheumatism
- Arthritis Care & Research
- Arthritis Research & Therapy

- Australian Journal of Physiotherapy
- Best Practice & Research Clinical Rheumatology
- Clinical & Experimental Rheumatology
- Current Opinion in Rheumatology
- Current Orthopaedics
- Gait & Posture
- Hong Kong Physiotherapy Journal
- International Musculoskeletal Medicine
- Journal of Back and Musculoskeletal Rehabilitation
- Journal of Clinical Rheumatology
- Journal of Manual & Manipulative Therapy
- Journal of Orthopaedics, Trauma and Rehabilitation
- Journal of Rheumatology (Canada)
- Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport
- Journal of the American physical therapy association
- Journal of the Chartered Society of physiotherapy
- Lupus
- Manual Therapy
- Osteoarthritis and Cartilage
- Osteoarthritis and Cartilage is the official journal of the Osteoarthritis Research Society International
- Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Clinics of North America
- Physical Therapy Journal
- Physical Therapy in Sport
- Physical Therapy Reviews
- Physiotherapy
- Rheumatic disease clinics of North America
- Rheumatology (London)
- Seminars in Arthritis and Rheumatism
- Seminars in Arthritis and Rheumatism
- The official journal of AAOMPT, The McKenzie Institute International, NZMPA, OMTAustralia and CAMPT
- The pain clinic
- The Scandinavian Journal of Rheumatology is the official journal of the Scandinavian Society for Rheumatology.
- The Spine Journal
- EMJ Rheumatology @EMJRheum
- Am. J. Sports Med. @AJSM\_SportsMed
- Arthroscopy Journal @ArthroscopyJ
- Nature Reviews Rheumatology @NatRevRheumatol
- Journal of Arthritis @ArthritisJ
- Shoulder Elbow Surgery @ShoulderElbowSu
- Practical Pain Management @PPMeditor
- British Journal of Sports medicine @BJSM\_BMJ
- JAMASurgery @JAMASurgery
- Arthritis Journal @arthritisjourna
- Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Disorders @arthritisjourna
- Journal of Orthopaedic and Sports Physical Therapy @JOSPT
- The Journal of the American Medical Association @JAMA\_current
- Journal of Bone & Joint Surgery @jbjs
- The Lancet @The Lancet
- The BMJ @bmj\_latest