

Consumer health information

Compiled by Susan Murray

Consumers and the Internet

<http://www.aishealth.com/EHealthBusiness/060905.html>

In a survey sponsored by the Medical Broadcast Company (US), more than 40% of the 991 consumers surveyed chose the Internet as their most trusted media source for health information, compared with 16% who believed the information from other media outlets. Although physicians remain the most trusted source of health information overall, more than 65% of consumers are going online to supplement their visit, either before or after the appointment. When looking for health information on the Web, more than 85% of respondents indicated they consult two or more sites.

http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Healthtopics_May05.pdf

According to the Pew Internet and American Life Report "Health Information Online", released in May 2005, "eight in ten Internet users have looked online for information on at least one of 16 health topics, with increased interest since 2002 in diet, fitness, drugs, health insurance, experimental treatments, and particular doctors and hospitals."

Public Health Information Tutorial and Manual

<http://phpartners.org/tutorial/>

The online Public Health Information and Data Tutorial is a new online tool designed to help the public health workforce effectively locate and use health information. The tutorial was prepared by the National Library of Medicine (NLM), in collaboration with the University of Michigan Public Health Library & Informatics Division, and Partners in Information Access for the Public Health Workforce. The training manual can be downloaded, and there are no copyright restrictions.

New consumer health information (CHI) publications

Lewis D, Eysenbach G, Kukafka R, Stavri PZ, Jimison H, editors. *Consumer health informatics: informing consumers and improving health care*. Secaucus, N.J.: Springer; 2005.

The 20 chapters in this volume explore the dialogue between patients and computers in seeking health information. Authors include Dr. Gunther Eysenbach, Senior Scientist at

the Centre for Global eHealth Innovation, based at the University Health Network (design and evaluation of consumer health information Web sites, computers as support groups, and virtual communities MedCERTAIN/MedCIRCLE), Eve-Marie Lacroix from the NLM, and Catherine Arnott Smith (the 10 000 consumer health questions project funded by NLM).

US Government sites – CHI search

<http://www.healthfinder.gov/search/about.asp>

The US government Web site healthfinder has released a Google-powered search tool that limits searches to consumer health information from 300 US government agencies.

Consumer health sites and databases – review

Golderman G, Connolly B. Staying healthy. *netconnect* (supplement to *Library Journal*). 2005 Summer:18–26. Available from <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA609686.html>.

This article rates the major CHI sites with headings entitled content, searchability, price, and who needs it? Furthermore, it includes Alt HealthWatch (EBSCO), Health and Wellness Resource Center and Alternative Health Module (Gale), Health Source – Consumer Edition (EBSCO), Natural & Alternative Treatments (EBSCO), and ProQuest Health and Medical Complete (ProQuest Information & Learning). The article also provides brief reviews of the following six health Web sites: Health AtoZ, Mayo Clinic, MedlinePlus, MerckSource, National Library of Medicine, and WebMd Health.

The New York Times "Being a Patient" series

Jan Hoffman authored the following two thought-provoking stories in the 14 August 2005 issue of *The New York Times*:

"Awash in information, patients face a lonely, uncertain road", pp. 1, 16–17.

"Patients turn to advocates, support groups and e-mail, too", p. 17.

With a plethora of health information offering overwhelming treatment options, this series raises the question of who will guide today's patient.

Natural Cures “They” Don’t Want You to Know About
and other controversial health books

In October 2005, a discussion began on the CAPHIS listserv about Kevin Trudeau’s book *Natural Cures “They” Don’t Want You to Know About*. On one side of the ring are librarians who believe that it is the duty of public librarians not to be the arbiter of what is authoritative health information and make this book available to users. On the other side are librarians who feel that collection development policy should determine what materials are purchased, i.e., the credentials and reputation of the author, if the ideas being put forth have any merit and (or) evidence, etc. In case you haven’t heard about Kevin Trudeau, he’s a prolific marketer — selling everything from health products (e.g., a coral calcium product

purported to cure cancer) to a mega memory system that would help anyone achieve a photographic memory (even people with learning disabilities and low IQs) — who was banned by the US Federal Trade Commission in 2004 and fined US\$2 million for making misleading disease or health benefits claims on his many infomercials (see <http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2004/09/trudeaucoral.htm>).

At CHIS, we decided not to purchase this book, nor have we purchased the many “natural cures for...” (diabetes, high blood pressure, headaches, killer germs, and my favourite — health disasters) books authored by Dr. Cass Ingram, an osteopath by training. How does your library handle consumer demand for these sorts of books?