

HEALTHNET NEWS

A newsletter for public librarians and others interested in consumer health information services

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UPDATE

DID I HEAR YOU CORRECTLY??

Recently, a startled librarian, who is a loyal user of the Healthnet reference service, looked up suddenly as we were explaining at one of our workshops how to access Healthnet's customized research program for consumer health questions. Contrary to the instructions we have been giving librarians for a number of years, we explained that, although Healthnet primarily functions as a back-up reference service for the public libraries in Connecticut, library patrons/customers may also contact Healthnet directly with personal health questions, if they wish. We even distribute a bright purple flyer explaining our reference service that includes our central Healthnet phone number and email address!

YES, this option is a change from our previous, rather strict policy that each consumer health question we researched had to originate from a public library.

In the past, some patrons were frustrated at being referred from our library back to their hometown library before we would begin to research their question. Others explained that they felt uncomfortable speaking with the staff at their own neighborhood public library about personal health concerns. They seemed to feel more at ease speaking with the anonymous librarians at Healthnet over the telephone or by email.

We still encourage public librarians who have been researching a health question for a library patron to contact us directly, rather than giving our telephone number to the patron. Often the patron does not know what resources have already been checked and the librarian is better able to supply us with this information so we don't end up searching the same resources.

Librarians – keep calling us for assistance. If the question is complex, or the patron isn't forthcoming with enough detail about the question, or if you're pressed for time, feel free to explain the services of Healthnet and give the patron our telephone number. In all cases, when we speak with patrons, we point out to all of them the valuable resources that their own public library provides for finding consumer health information.

A copy of the flyer we distribute is included with this newsletter (<http://library.uchc.edu/departm/hnet/medquest.pdf>) Please feel free to make copies for your library.

NETNEWS



RESOURCES ON BIOLOGICAL AND CHEMICAL WEAPONS

MedlinePlus, the National Library of Medicine's web site for consumers, has a listing of links to important information on **biological and chemical weapons** at <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/biologicalandchemicalweapons.html>. The page features current news related to anthrax and other biological and chemical weapons, an interactive tutorial on anthrax, questions and answers on types of biological and chemical warfare, illnesses caused by biological agents, a link to the Toxicology Data Network databases, advice on coping with anxiety associated with bioterrorism, and a list of organizations conducting research or involved in civil preparedness.

MedlinePlus also has a special section on **smallpox** at <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/smallpox.html>. This feature includes the latest smallpox news, a general overview of the disease, photographs, diagrams, fact sheets, current research and links to organizations.



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INFORMATION ABOUT PHYSICIANS PRACTICING IN OTHER STATES

The web site of the **Association of State Medical Board Executive Directors** (<http://www.docboard.org/>) lists 19 states that have online information about physicians and other healthcare professionals. Basic information provided for the most part on every state's web site includes information about the physician's license status, place and date of medical degree, internship and residencies, number of years in practice, board certifications, and whether they have had any license disciplinary action taken against them. Some states have more comprehensive information. Massachusetts, for instance, provides information on the number of malpractice claims the physician has had and gives a ranking of the amount of the award given the plaintiff in the case. A ranking indicates whether the award was below average, average, or above average, but there is no explanation about what these rankings mean in monetary terms.

New York and Connecticut are not listed on this site. Profiles of Connecticut physicians can be found at the **Connecticut Department of Public Health's** web site at <http://www.dph.state.ct.us/>. The **State of New York** only provides information about professional misconduct and physician discipline at the New York State Department of Health web site at <http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/opmc/main.htm>

EXPERT INFORMATION ON HEART DISEASE IN ADULTS AND CHILDREN



HeartCenterOnline (<http://www.heartcenteronline.com/myheartdr/home/>) is a cardiovascular specialized health care site that provides cardiovascular patients, their families, and other site visitors with the tools they need to better understand the complex nature of heart-related conditions, treatments, and preventive care. The site also provides services to physicians to assist them in their cardiology practices.

The site has an excellent overview of heart disease in adults and children. Information is written by board-certified cardiologists and cardiovascular surgeons on topics including cardiac diseases, medical procedures and diagnostic tests, surgery, drugs used in the treatment of heart disease, and tools to assess heart disease risk. The site includes information on congenital and acquired heart diseases.

A library of full-color illustrations and animations demonstrate the anatomy and physiology of the heart, how disease affects the function of the heart, diagnostic tests and procedures, how to do cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and much more. Animations include procedures such as angiography, coronary bypass surgery, and balloon angioplasty. The latest version of Shockwave software is needed to view the animations. It can be downloaded free at <http://www.shockwave.com>.

Other features on the site include current medical news, a free newsletter, calculators to determine heart disease risk, calories burned, body mass index, ideal weight, and target heart rate, and an ask the cardiologist feature.

FINDING QUALITY HEALTH CARE

Several Internet resources are available to help consumers find quality health care -

Now You Have a Diagnosis (<http://www.ahcpr.gov/consumer/diaginfo.htm>), a publication created through a partnership between the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) and the Kanter Family Foundation, has information to help patients use research and other information to make the best treatment decisions. The publication describes where to find reliable information about a disease or medical condition. These reliable resources include organizations that advocate for the specific disease or medical condition, libraries, and the Internet. Links are given for several high quality sites including **Healthfinder** (<http://www.healthfinder.gov/>) and **MedlinePlus** (<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus>). Caution is given about using the Internet for health information and a link is provided to a Federal Trade Commission article that discusses how to recognize deceptive and misleading information on web sites.

Another feature on this site describes the different types of healthcare research – laboratory experiments, clinical trials, epidemiological research, and outcomes research. A brief description is given for each type of research with a statement on its importance in the field of healthcare research.

Another link is to the AHRQ publication “**Your Guide to Choosing Quality Healthcare: Choosing Treatments**, at <http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/diaginf4.htm>. This publication was developed to help patients make health care decisions using information about quality. The Guide is based on research about the information people want and need to make informed decisions about their medical care. These are major decisions most people face at one time or another during their lives—either for themselves or for a loved one.

Available as an HTML or a PDF document, this lengthy publication offers advice on choosing a health plan, a doctor, treatments, a hospital, and long-term care. It also tells how to improve patient/doctor communication, how to keep track of a personal health history, how to get the necessary tests and the most accurate results, and how to make informed decisions about elective (non-emergency) surgery. Guidelines are also given on how to find reliable health information on the Internet.

HELPING PATIENTS MAKE MORE INFORMED DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR MEDICAL CARE



Some medical treatments can cure a disease or condition but there are those that are not as effective. Sometimes the treatment can be worse than the disease. At other times it can look as though a drug or other treatment did the trick, while the benefit really came from something else that happened at the same time, such as getting more rest. In some instances, the disease may have just run its course and there would have been improvement even without the treatment or medication. Good evidence is needed to know if a treatment or medication really works and this information must come from high quality clinical research trials.

The **Cochrane Collaboration Consumer Network** (<http://www.cochraneconsumer.com/>) is part of an international non-profit organization that aims to help people make informed decisions about health care by reviewing and promoting the best available evidence on the effects of interventions and treatments. Based in England, the Collaboration is a private charity organization that also aims to affect the future research agenda in health by identifying where enough research has been done, and where more is needed.

The main area of the site is the Cochrane Health Summaries. These can be viewed by browsing the topics list or using the key word search function. The summaries are original articles written by members of review groups and are based on research findings from studies reported in the medical literature. These summaries represent the best evidence available on the treatment of diseases and medical conditions.

The site also has information to help consumers understand medical research and the concept of risk in medical treatment. Another area provides the opportunity for users to send in comments on various health care issues covered in the Cochrane newsletter, which is also available, online.

The Health Summaries section uses information from the Collaboration’s main product, the **Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews**. This free database is part of the Cochrane Library of databases (<http://www.update-software.com/default.htm>) that contains full text topic reviews of the most authoritative treatment information. This database is designed to help health care providers determine what the best evidence is for the efficacy of medical treatments.

Although this site has important and valuable information, it is poorly designed and difficult to navigate. Don’t let that stop you, however, from using the site to find the “best evidence” for the efficacy of treatment options for specific diseases and medical conditions.

TWO GREAT SITES FOR INFORMATION ON PARENTING, EDUCATION, AND CHILD HEALTH AND SAFETY

Do you know about the **greatkidsCT** web site (<http://www.greatkidsct.org/>)? This site is sponsored by the Connecticut State Library and is funded by the Child Health & Development Institute of Connecticut, the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, and the Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities. The purpose of the site is to serve as a one-stop location for finding resources on topics important to Connecticut parents. The site focuses on topics related to education, parenting, and health and safety information and include links to high quality and authoritative web sites.

Topics in the learning (education) section include links to information on child development, early literacy, gifted and talented children, head start programs, home schooling, school readiness, and reading. Profiles of individual schools and school districts are also included along with information on the various Connecticut laws governing education. The parenting section includes links to information on childcare, discipline, divorce, adoption, gay and lesbian families, grandparents, toilet training, and children and pets.

Health and safety links are given for childhood illnesses, child abuse, breastfeeding, car safety, mental health, immunization, nutrition, physical disabilities, violence, terrorism and many other topics.

Many of the links are to Connecticut agencies and associations providing program and services of interest to parents and child caregivers. These include the Connecticut Commission on Children, Connecticut Association for the Gifted, Connecticut Home School Network, and others. Links to national sites are to well-known and respected organizations such as the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, National Mental Health Association, National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Parents Information Network, United States Department of Education, and many others.

Child and Family WebGuide (<http://www.cfw.tufts.edu/>) is a creation of the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development at Tufts University, in collaboration with academic librarians at Tufts' Tisch Library and the Society for Research in Child Development. The WebGuide identifies, describes and evaluates web sites that contain the most credible research based information available in five major categories: Family/Parenting, Education/Learning, Health/Mental Health, Typical Development, and Childcare/Daycare.. A sixth category, Activities, contains sites organized by region, with non-research based information about specific programs and things to do.

Topics under the Family/Parenting category include abuse, discipline, foster care, adoption, poverty, fathers, and TV/media. The Education/Learning category has information on gifted children, home schooling, learning disabilities, literacy/reading, physical disabilities, bullies, sports, and mentoring. Topics in the Health/Mental Health category include attention deficit disorder, anxiety/fears, behavior problems, drugs and alcohol, eating disorders, health insurance, talking about terrorism, and hospitalization. Other subjects in the remaining categories offer links to information on evaluating daycare programs, research on the long term effects of child daycare, brain development, language development, teen dating and sexuality.



Each of the links on this site has been evaluated for content, authority, ease of use, and stability. A link is provided to the review of each of the sites.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

The following books are recommended for consumer health collections. These books are not part of the UCHC Library collection.

After any diagnosis : how to take action against your illness using the best and most current medical information available. Carol Svec. Three Rivers Press, 2001. (ISBN 0-609-80669-6), \$15.00.

Patients who have just received a diagnosis from their physician may be so overwhelmed by the unwelcome news that they may not be able to absorb the relevant medical information that the doctor is presenting. After a brief time period, they may seek information about the diagnosis. This comprehensive, consumer-friendly book advises patients how to take pro-active, information-gathering steps after they have been diagnosed with an illness. It was written by a health researcher/freelance author who consulted a number of physicians and other health professionals for guidance. Their names and affiliations are included.

The book discusses, in clearly-written language, how to see beyond the surface of a news report, sources of information from the government, how to judge information gathered from the Internet, and methods of evaluating hospitals and physicians. The book concludes with a brief section on statistics and interpreting research studies. It includes an overview of Medline, the essential National Library of Medicine database that indexes medical journal articles.

In addition, it wisely recommends that patients form an information-seeking partnership with “one of the reference librarians at [the] local public library,” and reminds the reader that the “librarian is there for information only, not for [providing medical] advice.” There is an index, and a chapter-by-chapter bibliography that refers to medical journal articles. A very helpful, basic overview about gathering medical information.

This guide further describes how to make a decision that is best for you. It advises the reader to check out all options, look at the benefits and risks of each treatment, and to develop a treatment plan with your doctor. (JK)

Complete home wellness handbook: home remedies / prevention / self-care. John Edward Swartzberg, Sheldon Margen, and the editors of the UC Berkeley Wellness Letter. Rebus, 2001. (ISBN 0-929661-65-6). \$27.96.

Written by the editors and consultants of the consumer guide is also a product of the University of California, Berkeley School of Public Health. Focusing on wellness rather than disease, this book about how an individual can make positive steps to the book discusses “Ailments and Disorders” such as seasonal affective disorder, Fifth disease, that an individual can positively impact or try to prevent. For each disorder, there is a brief discussion of symptoms, causes, prevention, home remedies, when to call your doctor, and treatment the doctor is likely to recommend.



University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter, this of California, Berkeley School of Public Health. makes recommendations, in accessible language, enhance and maintain good health. The bulk of dermatitis, hay fever, Lyme disease, kidney stones, individual can positively impact or try to prevent. For

The book begins with recommendations on healthy diet, exercise, and preventive screening tests. There is a brief chapter on types of alternative therapies. Information on growth patterns and health concerns of different age groups is included. The book concludes with an overview of types of over-the-counter medications and some specific dietary and herbal supplements, a description of each, how they work, and health claims made for them. A glossary, index, and brief list of health organizations to contact for further information are also included. An introductory consumer health guide that encourages patient participation and positive health habits. (JK)

Healthy Women, Healthy Lives. Susan E. Hankinson, Graham Colditz, JoAnn E. Manson, Frank E. Speizer, editors. Simon and Schuster, 2001. 546 p. (ISBN 0-684-85519-4).

Does a high fat diet increase the risk of breast cancer? Which vitamins provide protection from cancer risk? Can quitting smoking reverse the risk of stroke that it raised? Detailed answers to these questions and others directly related to women’s health were determined by analysis of research outcomes from the ongoing Harvard Medical School sponsored Nurses’ Health Study. More than 120,000 women have continued to respond to questions about their nutrition and health habits since the research study was initiated in 1976.

This comprehensive, not very technical book, presents the results of research generated by the Nurses’ Health Study and other related studies on women’s health. The book is a clearly written guide to recommended health practices that the studies proved valuable. Its attractive design helps to make the content understandable. The book includes many graphs and charts on topics such as the effect of a woman’s weight on her risk of endometrial cancer, relative risk factors for hip fractures, and risk of lung cancer by number of cigarettes smoked daily.

In addition to explaining the history of the Nurses’ Health Study and how it has been conducted, the book discusses how to lower the risk of stroke, lung cancer, osteoporosis, diabetes, breast cancer, and other diseases. One extensive section of the book explains how to change specific health behaviors such as physical activity, nutrition, weight control, and alcohol consumption. Each part of this section has a related article written by a physician on “What I Tell My Patients About..” The book also discusses types of epidemiologic research studies and provides advice on being an informed health consumer.

A valuable source of information for women actively trying to lower their risk of disease and improve their health. (JK)

Heart of a child : what families need to know about heart disorders in children. 2nd ed. Edward B. Clark, Carleen Clark, Catherine A. Neill. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001. 352 p. (ISBN 0-8018-6636-7), \$\$17.95.

This book provides up-to-date and reliable information from medical experts for parents whose child has a heart disorder. The first edition was highly praised for helping families understand and cope with heart disorders and appeared on many support organizations lists of ‘must have’ books.

This new edition reflects changes in technologies available for the diagnosis and treatment of children’s heart disorders, including surgery and medication, new knowledge about genetics, and changes in the health care delivery system. All of the illustrations have been updated according to this new knowledge.

The first section of the book includes chapters on the diagnosis of a heart problem in a child, normal and abnormal functioning of the heart, and risk factors for heart defects. A second section discusses specific heart disorders including defects in the developing heart and acquired heart problems occurring after birth. Treatment of heart defects is covered extensively in the third section and includes those problems that require no treatment, those requiring emergency treatment after birth, problems requiring treatment with or without surgery, and problems requiring complex treatment. A separate chapter offers advice and counsel for parents when treatment fails and their child dies.

Additional chapters offer suggestions for explaining the child’s heart problems to family and friends, and describe special considerations for when the child enters school, becomes a teenager, and the adult with a congenital heart defect. Advice is also given on maintaining a heart health family lifestyle. Resources include a brief list of web sites, a glossary, and a list of additional readings.



*Healthnet News is written by Alberta L. Richetelle with the assistance of Judith Kronick.
If you have questions about anything in the newsletter or about Healthnet services for Connecticut public libraries,
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