

# HEALTHNET NEWS

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

Volume XVIII Number 3

Fall 2003

## UPDATE

### ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE PROGRAM

Healthnet sponsored a successful program on alternative medicine, which was held at the Farmington Library on November 5<sup>th</sup>. The featured speaker was Karen Prestwood, M.D., specialist in Internal Medicine and Geriatrics at the University of Connecticut Health Center in Farmington. Dr. Prestwood discussed the classification of alternative therapies developed by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCAM) and research studies on these therapies. She also described how she uses alternative therapies in her practice.



Laurie Ann Leach presented a program on Qi Gong a self-healing art that combines movement and meditation. Qi Gong helps reduce stress, increase vitality, and enhance the immune system.

A resource list of recommended books and websites was given to librarians who attended the program. This resource list is on the Healthnet web site at <http://library.uhc.edu/departm/hnet/altmedres.html>. If you'd like a print copy, contact Alberta Richetelle, Healthnet Program Director, at 860/679-4055 or email: [richetelle@nso.uhc.edu](mailto:richetelle@nso.uhc.edu).

### ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE REFERENCE QUESTION! WHAT SHOULD I DO?

During the question and answer period for Dr. Prestwood's talk, someone asked if, when a library patron has a question about a disease or medical condition and its treatment, librarians should recommend to their patrons that they try alternative therapies. The short answer to this question is "No", not unless the person specifically asks for information on alternative therapies. You as the librarian would not recommend the person consider alternative therapies just as you would not recommend they see your personal physician, or that they use a certain tax form because they may get a larger refund (after all, you did), or, rather than seek a lawyer they try the "do it yourself divorce" (it worked great for your cousin Betty).

The point was then raised that an individual may not know that some alternative therapies may help, so the librarian would, in this instance, be educating the individual about the existence of these therapies. This point does not advance the argument that librarians should suggest the person try an alternative therapy. Librarians are not clinicians; we cannot and should not assume that we know what the person asking the question needs in the way of treatment. Librarians are information specialists and our job is to find the best information we can from books and online databases in response to what the person says he or she wants to know.

What if the person poses this question? "My doctor has recommended surgery for carpal tunnel syndrome. Are there alternative treatments for this condition?" Some may immediately interpret that this person is looking for alternative treatments such as herbs, Tai chi, or other similar modalities. However, the important thing to do in this case before beginning the search, is to determine what the person means by "alternative". Alternative, in this case, may mean established conservative treatments such as wrist splints and anti-inflammatory medications. Granted, in your search for information and, depending upon where you look, you may come across information on treatments that are outside established medical protocols that may be discussed along with recognized standard treatments. If you find this information, it is perfectly acceptable to offer this to the person asking the question.

Remember the importance of an effective reference interview. Don't assume you know what the person wants or needs and don't let your own opinions and biases affect your professional role of finding the best information for the person who has a question.



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## *NETNEWS*

### *NEW WEB SITE FOR SENIORS*

The **National Institutes of Health (NIH)** recently launched **NIHSeniorHealth.gov**, at <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/> a new talking web site with formats and topics tailored to the needs of older people. This site is designed to encourage older people to use the Internet and, in particular, to find the best information on health and medical research related to a health concern. Dr. Ellias A. Zerhouni, director of the NIH states "... the NIH must share what it knows with the public about keeping healthy and dealing with disease [and] this translation of research into everyday use is a critical part of the NIH's mission".

The site features large print and short, easy-to-read segments of information repeated in a variety of formats to increase the likelihood it will be remembered. Consistent page layout and prompts make it easy to move from place to place. There is an option to increase the print size as well as one that provides greater print contrast to make the content easier to read. Users have the option of reading the text or turning on the sound to have the text read to them.

Current topics on the site include Alzheimer's disease, arthritis, balance problems, breast cancer, caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease, colorectal cancer, exercise for older adults, hearing loss, lung cancer, and prostate. There is a link to **MedlinePlus** (<http://medlineplus.gov/>) for more health topics. Along with the National Institute of Aging (NIA) and the National Library of Medicine (NLM), other NIH components contributing topics to the web site include the National Cancer Institute, the National Institute for Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS), and the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD). More Institutes and Centers will be adding additional topics at a later date.

Each topic offers general background information on the diagnosis, causes, and treatment of the disease or topic, quizzes, and photos and illustrations. Some topics have video clips with an option to view a transcript of the clip.

### *ONLINE GUIDE TO AMERICA'S HOSPITALS*



On its website, the news magazine **U.S. News and World Report**, publisher of **America's Best Hospitals**, offers a free online directory to over 6,000 U.S. hospitals - [http://www.usnews.com/usnews/health/hospitals/hosp\\_home.htm](http://www.usnews.com/usnews/health/hospitals/hosp_home.htm). Statistical data has been obtained from the American Hospital Association (AHA). The AHA publishes an annual print directory to American hospitals, **American Hospital Association Guide to the Health Care Field**, as well as a free online database. The **U.S. News and World Report** Directory of America's Hospitals is easier to read, more clearly laid out, and has additional search features.

The online **U.S. News and World Report** Directory provides brief but potentially useful information about the services and characteristics of the hospitals described and links to the hospital websites. It includes an overview of each hospital in "snapshot form," listing types of services provided including outpatient and specialized areas. There is information on statistics such as staffing (number of full and part time physicians and nurses on hospital's staff), number of admissions during a recent one-year period, births, and emergency room visits.

The user can browse alphabetically by hospital name or by city within a state. The Directory is searchable by name of hospital, though this is not a practical searching method in an extensive, national database where there is more than one "Good Samaritan Hospital." An advanced search feature allows the user to search by location (specify state, distance from a zip code), hospital type, and by types of services or specialization offered, separately or in combination. Specifying types of services and location criteria allows the searcher to request, for instance, the names of hospitals within fifty miles of Waterbury, Connecticut that provide open heart surgery.

The Directory website also has a glossary of terms used and brief, practical articles on dealing with insurance companies effectively, preventing medical errors, importance of hospital volume in evaluating procedure effectiveness, and dealing with pre-surgery anxiety.

## HELP TO MAKE HEALTHIER FOOD CHOICES

**NutritionData** at <http://www.nutritiondata.com/> is a great way to get detailed information on the nutrients in your favorite foods, including those from McDonalds, Wendy's, and other fast food chains, and brand name foods you find in the grocery store. A search for a specific food generates a nutrition facts label, just like the one you see for most foods purchased at a grocery store. The label has information about the total number of calories in the food, the percentage of calories from fat, the total amount of fat, the percentage of saturated, polyunsaturated, and monounsaturated fats, percentages of cholesterol, sodium, carbohydrates, protein, vitamins, and minerals.



Percentages given are the Percent Daily Values. Daily Values are set by the government and reflect current nutrition recommendations for a 2,000-calorie reference diet. The Percent Daily Value can be used to compare food products and to see how the amount of a nutrient in a serving of food fits into a 2,000 calorie reference diet.

Other nutrient information given shows the percentage of carbohydrates, fats, and protein in the food and a rating of from one to five stars (highest rating) for the food. An explanation for the rating is given, for example "this food is good because it is low in saturated fats and sodium and is a good source of vitamin A, C, and E". The user needs to be aware that there are often missing values for specific foods which doesn't mean the value for that nutrient is zero.

NutritionData's search feature allows the user to search by food name, browse by category (there are 40 and include fast food chains), and to search by nutrient to find which foods are highest or lowest in any specific nutrient. The user can also search by caloric ratio, which is the ratio of carbohydrates, fats, and protein in the food, and search by rating to find the foods from each category with the highest ratings.

Other features on the site include a custom entry tool that allows the user to analyze foods that aren't in the NutritionData's database and a food additive identifier that contains a list of the many different additives that theoretically improve the quality of the food and the reason it is used. There is also a listing of the foods most frequently analyzed by visitors to the site in the past 24 hours.

There isn't an educational component to this site, so the information here is for the self-motivated individual who is interested in analyzing their diet in order to make healthier food choices.

## EATING FOR A HEALTHY HEART



Every 33 seconds, someone in the United States dies from heart disease. Although often thought of as a disease affecting mostly men, heart disease is the leading cause of death for women. A study published in the August 20, 2003 issues of the **Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)** showed that most cases of heart disease are caused by conventional risk factors – cigarette smoking, high cholesterol, diabetes, and hypertension. Most individuals through personal dietary and lifestyle choices can control all four of these risk factors. The JAMA article concludes that genetics does not play as important a role as a cause of heart disease as once thought.

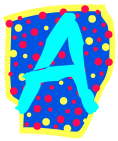
The **Healthy Refrigerator** at <http://www.healthyfridge.org/> can help individuals eat a healthier diet and at the same time lower cholesterol levels. Healthy Fridge is part of "Open The Door To A Healthy Heart," a national consumer education campaign to raise awareness about America's No. 1 health problem - heart disease - and how to prevent it through simple dietary changes.

There are four sections to the site – "The Healthy Fridge", "Good Nutrition", "Heart of the Matter", and "Just for Kids". The "Healthy Fridge" section has an easy to read list of ways to maintain a refrigerator with healthy food options. The section on "Good Nutrition" offers several heart healthy recipes for children and adults, a quiz to test your knowledge about saturated fats, a list of foods to choose more often and less often, facts about women's eating habits, and information on why eating healthy is a good investment.

The “Heart of the Matter” section offers important facts about heart disease. There is information on how to calculate your risk for heart disease, why controlling cholesterol levels is important, facts about heart disease, recent news stories related to heart disease, highlights of recent research on nutrition and heart disease, and a short list of links to other heart-healthy Internet sites. “Just for Kids” has information for parents on heart disease and children, a healthy fridge quiz for children, and a seek-a-word game.

This is an easy to use site with valuable information for individuals interested in changing their diets in order to lower their heart disease risk.

#### *RATINGS OF AMERICA'S NURSING HOMES*



**Gannett News Service (GNS)** recently published a special report on the quality of nursing home care in the United States. Details of the report can be found on the GNS web site at <http://content.gannettonline.com/gns/nursinghomes/>.

The site includes a searchable database of more than 16,000 nursing homes in the country with ratings for the level of care for each. The ratings were compiled using federal Medicare databases and cover the years from 1999 to 2003. Nursing homes can be searched by state and by county with the option of viewing nursing homes for a specific city. Once the results are listed, the user can view a report for each of the nursing homes.

Each report gives the address of the nursing home, the number of beds, the ownership (private non-profit, for profit, etc.) and the date of the last inspection. Each report lists ratings, based on a 1-5 star system with 5 being the highest rating, for ten indicators of patient well-being. For comparison purposes, a national and a state rating are also given. Patient well-being indicators include the percentages for the following: residents with pressure or bed sores; residents with infections, such as pneumonia; residents in physical restraints; residents who have lost some ability in basic tasks such as moving around or eating; and residents who have reported moderate or bad pain in the week prior to the survey. Indicators are also given for short-stay residents. Each report gives an explanation of how to interpret the ratings.

There is a summary rating for all inspections of the nursing home and a list of specific deficiencies noted in each of the inspections. The inspection report gives the date of the inspection, the specific deficiency noted, the scope of the deficiency (whether it as an isolated case or a pattern), the severity of the deficiency (whether the deficiency caused minimal harm, the potential for harm, or actual harm) and the date the deficiency was corrected.

The site also has a listing of 314 nursing homes with no violations from 1999-2003, tips on choosing a nursing home, a short glossary of nursing home terminology, and a list of resources on the Web to learn more about nursing home care.

## **FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION**



The following books are recommended for public libraries and health sciences libraries with consumer health collections. They are not part of the UCHC library collection.

**All You Need to Know About Joint Surgery: Preparing for Surgery, Recovery and an Active New Lifestyle.** Arthritis Foundation. John H. Klippel, editor. Arthritis Foundation, 2002. 235 p. (ISBN 0-912423-33-1), \$19.95.

A publication of the Arthritis Foundation, this clearly laid out guide to a variety of types of joint surgery starts with helpful guidance on deciding if surgery is necessary and appropriate. There are sample questions to ask the doctor, as well as a number of important practical and medical-related questions for the patient to consider (e.g. “What realistic level of improvement can I expect following joint surgery?” “What is involved in the recovery process?”)

The book gives an overview of the pre-surgical and surgical process, as well as medications and temporary non-drug therapies, such as splints and braces, that may provide alternative options to surgery. There is information about joint function, common types of arthritis and other kinds of joint and bone injury and diseases, types of joint surgery, and other treatment options, including complementary and alternative therapies. The detailed, basic explanations—and clear sketches—provided would be especially helpful to a patient or family member with little background information.

In addition, there are discussions about selecting a surgeon, preparing for surgery (e.g. weight loss, exercise, advance blood donation), what to expect immediately after surgery and during the recovery process, and possible long-term results of joint surgery.

The book concludes with a glossary of related medical terms, discussion questions to explore with the patient's health team and family, and information about resources and services provided by the Arthritis Foundation.

This is a very helpful addition to public library consumer health collections.

**American Dietetic Association Guide to Eating Right When You Have Diabetes.** Maggie Powers. John Wiley & Sons, 2003. 275 p. (ISBN 0-471-44222-4, \$14.95).

A registered dietitian, under the auspices of the American Dietetic Association, the national professional association of registered dietitians, wrote this very helpful, moderately priced guide to meal planning for diabetics. Author Maggie Powers is also an award-winning diabetes educator.



It is an especially useful, well-organized overview for a recently diagnosed diabetic. The book begins with a discussion of diabetes and its effects on the body, guidance on blood glucose levels, and how to test them. There are also explanations of the absorption and "action times" of various forms of insulin. There is information on adjusting insulin and food intake to activity levels and specific guidelines for healthy ways to lose weight.

The author encourages readers to plan their diets around foods that appeal to them as well as those that are healthful for diabetics. She includes details on how to count carbohydrates and adjust intake to blood glucose levels. There are explanations for coping with special circumstances---eating out, traveling, dining at a friend's house, working the night shift.

The appendix includes not only extensive food exchange lists, explaining food choices that can be substituted safely for others within a diabetic's diet, but also an exchange list especially for fast food restaurants and an ethnic food guide. A newly diagnosed patient's meal planning is guided with a section that has a week's worth of sample menus, with menu plans for five different levels of calorie intake.

This is a valuable addition to public library consumer health collections.

**Breast Cancer Resource Guide of Connecticut: a collection of information, resources, support and guidance to enhance the lives of all those touched by breast cancer.** University of Connecticut Health Center. Marty Mancuso, Kristen Zarfos. University of Connecticut Health Center, 2003.

Available at no charge from the University of Connecticut Health Center, by phone **(800) 535-6232** or by email: [bcinfo@uchc.edu](mailto:bcinfo@uchc.edu). The guide is also available online at <http://breastcancer.uchc.edu/>.

This valuable new breast cancer publication, which incorporates many Connecticut resources, has been published to guide newly diagnosed breast cancer patients. It is a joint effort of many Connecticut and national organizations and contributors---physicians, nurses, social workers, researchers, and librarians. Intended to reassure as well as educate, it includes photos and quotations from breast cancer survivors about their experiences. It encourages readers to make careful, informed decisions about their treatment. The text begins with the statement, "STOP! You have time to read this material, to call other people, and to get a second, or even third opinion."

Written for patients and their families in nontechnical language, it includes both basic and detailed information about breast cancer diagnosis and treatment, much of it practical as well as medical. Included are management charts for symptoms experienced during chemotherapy and radiation treatments, accompanied by coping suggestions. There is information about types of breast cancer, explanations of breast cancer genetics, and diagnostic staging categories. A chart describing treatments is organized by stage of the cancer. In the text there is also a discussion of complementary therapy and its use as an addition to, not as a substitute for, conventional medical treatment

Readers are encouraged to use the Resource Guide as a tool to help gather information and to assist in formulating questions for health care providers. Helpful as a workbook as well as a guide, it includes pages for the reader to complete about her medical history, lifestyle, and ongoing treatment.

There are sources of legal and financial support as well as information about support groups providing emotional support. The book incorporates information about specific circumstances such as cancer recurrence, breast cancer diagnosis during pregnancy, need to reassure children in the family, cancer care for lesbians, and male breast cancer. Multicultural resources, including booklets available in Spanish as well as Spanish language support groups and hotlines, are listed. Each chapter concludes with lists of relevant print and online resources.

The guide's concluding section identifies specific breast cancer clinical services at Connecticut hospitals including counseling, hormone therapy, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, bone marrow transplants, stem cell transplants, and massage therapy. There is also information about locations of Connecticut cancer centers, mammography facilities and support groups.

A valuable patient guide, enhanced by its wealth of Connecticut information.



*Healthnet News is written by Alberta L. Richetelle and Judith Kronick.  
If you have questions about anything in the newsletter or about Healthnet services for Connecticut public libraries,  
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ISSN: 1526-8624