

# HEALTHNET NEWS

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

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## UPDATE

### *MEDICAL REFERENCE WORKSHOP SCHEDULED FOR OCTOBER 15<sup>TH</sup>*

A medical reference tools and techniques workshop for public librarians will be held on Wednesday, October 15, 2003 at the Wallingford Public Library. The program will run from 9:00 a.m. (with coffee served at 8:45 a.m.) until 12:30 p.m.

This is a basic introductory program for public librarians who provide medical information to the public (non-health professionals). The program will include general guidelines for answering medical questions, techniques for answering specific kinds of questions, and a review of print and on-line resources for answering questions. Policies and procedures for referring consumer health questions to Healthnet will also be discussed.

If you are interested in attending, please fill out the registration at <http://library.uhc.edu/departm/hnet/regis.pdf> and return it to the address indicated by Wednesday, October 7<sup>th</sup>. A confirmation letter with directions to the workshop will be sent when we receive your registration.

### *SAVE THE DATE*

Healthnet is planning to offer a program on **integrative medicine** on **November 5th** at the Farmington Public Library. Guest speaker will be Karen Prestwood, MD, of the University of Connecticut Health Center. Integrative medicine seeks to work with the body's natural potential for healing and uses evidence based complementary and alternative practices along with conventional medical therapies to help in the healing process. Integrative medicine not only pays attention to the physical bodies of patients but also to their emotions, minds, and the spiritual aspects of their lives.

Dr. Prestwood is a specialist in Internal Medicine, has conducted research in integrative medicine and alternative medical therapies, and uses a holistic approach in caring for her patients. Healthnet staff will also review important print and online resources for alternative therapies.

All public librarians in Connecticut are invited to what will be a timely and informative program. Watch for more details and registration information.

## ORGANIZATIONS

### *RECOMMENDED BOOK ON MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS*

Amy Watkins, Chapter Program Coordinator for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Connecticut Chapter, recently informed us of a new edition of a book on multiple sclerosis. The title is **Multiple Sclerosis: the questions you have – the answers you need**. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Demos Publishing, 2000; ISBN 1-888799-43-9, \$39.50). Edited by Rosalind C. Kalb, Ph.D., this highly recommended book offers comprehensive information about multiple sclerosis, covering important topics such as diagnosis, treatments, the impact of multiple sclerosis on the person and his or her family, symptom management, psychosocial issues, and legal and insurance issues.

The MS Society points out that significant changes in the treatment of multiple sclerosis have been made over the last few years. The Society wants to encourage libraries to remove outdated materials from their shelves and replace them with newer editions since the old publications do not reflect the most up-to-date information. To read more about the book and for updates to this edition visit the Demos Publishing web site at <http://www.demosmedpub.com/book45.html>.



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## NETNEWS

### FREE MEDICAL JOURNALS

**FreeMedicalJournals.com** – <http://www.freemedicaljournals.com/> - is dedicated to promoting free access to medical journals. This site includes a listing of over 1,300 medical and scientific journals that are available online to anyone free of charge. The site lists journals by specialty and alphabetically by title. There are six journals available free from the date of publication. Three familiar titles include the **British Medical Journal**, **CA: Cancer Journal for Clinicians**, and **Emerging Infectious Diseases**.

Twelve journals are available free one to six months after publication. Several widely know journals in this category include **New England Journal of Medicine** (free after six months), **Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences** (free after six months), and **Infection and Immunity** (free after one month).

A more extensive list of journals available one year after publication includes widely known titles, such as **Science**, **Annals of Internal Medicine**, **Circulation**, **Hypertension**, **Stroke**, **Journal of Clinical Nutrition**, and **Diabetes**.

English and foreign language journals are included and an email alert feature allows users to receive updates on new journals added to the site.

### WHAT HARMFUL CHEMICALS ARE HIDING UNDER YOUR SINK?

Did you know that many common household, auto, garden, and hobby products contain substances that pose health risks if they are ingested, swallowed or inhaled? Here's an easy way to learn about these harmful substances and reduce your exposure. The National Institutes of Health recently launched a consumer's guide that provides easy-to-understand information on the potential health effects of more than 2,000 ingredients contained in more than 4,000 common household products.



The **National Library of Medicine's (NLM) Household Products Database** (<http://householdproducts.nlm.nih.gov/>) provides information in consumer friendly language on these substances and their potential health effects. For more technical information users can launch a search for a product or ingredient in TOXNET from the Product Page in the database.

Information in the database is provided to NLM under a collaborative agreement and is derived from publicly available sources, including brand-specific labels and information provided by manufacturers and their Web sites. The list of products covered will be expanded, and information for products currently in the database will be updated at least annually.

"The Household Products Database is a natural outgrowth of the work that the Library has done in recent years, educating the public about environmental risks posed by chemicals in the air, soil and water," explained NLM Director Dr. Donald A.B. Lindberg. "Last year, we unveiled **Tox Town** (<http://toxtown.nlm.nih.gov/>), a site that introduces consumers to the toxic chemicals and environmental risks they might encounter in everyday life, in everyday places. Tox Town looks at facilities like schools, office buildings and factories, and the chemicals likely to be in them. With the Household Products site, we go inside the user's home and provide information about common products and their potential health effects."

NLM has provided toxicologists and scientists with an important set of databases for many years. The target audience of the Household Products Database, however, is both scientists and the general public. Users can browse a product category, such as 'Auto Care' or 'Landscape/Yard' by brand name or by alphabetical listing. Products can also be searched by type, manufacturer, product ingredient, or chemical name.

The Household Products Database enables users to learn what's in the products under the kitchen sink, in the garage, in the bathroom, and on the laundry room shelf. It is designed to help answer questions such as:

- \* What chemicals are contained in specific brands and in what percentage?
- \* Which products contain specified chemicals?
- \* Who manufactures a specific brand? How can I contact the manufacturer?
- \* What are the potential health effects of the chemical ingredients in a specific brand?
- \* What other information is available about such chemicals in the toxicology-related databases of the National Library of Medicine?

For example, a homeowner trying to decide which weed killer to use in the yard could select the 'Landscape/Yard' category in the Household Products Database and then select the category 'Herbicide'. She could then choose several brands to examine for chemical contents and possible health hazards. The record for each product would show her the ingredients from another database called the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS). Designed to provide workers and emergency personnel with the proper procedures for handling or working with a particular substance, these sheets are produced by the manufacturer of the product as required by Federal law.

#### *ASKME3.ORG – PROMOTING BETTER PATIENT/DOCTOR COMMUNICATION*



A coalition of 19 of the nation's top health and civic organizations, including the American Medical Association, the American Public Health Association, and the National Council on Aging, recently unveiled an aggressive campaign to call attention to the growing public health problem of 'health literacy' – the ability to read, understand, and act on health information. The group, Partnership for Clear Health Communication, asserts that literacy skills are a stronger predictor of a person's health status than age, income, employment status, educational level, or racial and ethnic group. Although 'health literacy' may be due to poor reading comprehension skills, even people who are college educated and can understand complicated words prefer to have medical information stated in simple terms.

The Partnership believes that effective communication tools are important in helping doctors and patients to communicate in ways that everyone can understand and respond. To help patients and providers communicate in a clear manner, an online resource was developed called **Ask Me 3** - <http://www.askme3.org/>. The site has patient and provider educational materials aimed at fostering better patient/physician communication through the promotion of three simple questions patients can ask their providers in every health care interaction:

- \* 1. What is my main problem?
- \* 2. What do I need to do?
- \* 3. Why is it important for me to do this?

The site also has a brief list of tips for better health communications which includes a one-page worksheet patients can take with them on their office visit, special materials for providers and organizations, a bibliography of research studies on health literacy, guidelines on how providers may make referrals for their patients to literacy programs, and a listing of words health providers should avoid using with examples of substitute words. The patient publications and several of the provider publications are available in Spanish.

#### *YOUR MOTHER ALWAYS WARNED YOU TO SIT UP STRAIGHT*

...now the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is following suit, but in a slightly different context. The CDC's new feature on its site – <http://www.cdc.gov/od/ohs/Ergonomics/Ergohome.htm> - offers information on ergonomics, the discipline concerned with fitting the environment to suit the person in it. In recent years, the CDC Office of Health and Safety has identified repetitive motion injuries as a factor in employee injuries. These injuries are caused by excessive and repeated physical stress on the musculoskeletal system - the hands, wrists, elbow, shoulders, neck, and back.

The site describes briefly the importance of ergonomics and then offers specific guidelines for computer workstations, laboratory work, and industrial situations. The computer workstation guidelines describe how to set up the work area, what type of chair is best suited to computer use, position of the monitor, keyboard placement and use, proper use of the mouse, trackball, or other pointing device, lighting, work habits, and use of laptop computers (which are not recommended as permanent workstations).

Laboratory and industrial ergonomic guidelines cover computer workstation issues and also repetitive pipetting, microscope use, biosafety cabinets and laboratory workbenches, working in glove boxes or anaerobic chambers, and overhead and heavy lifting. The laboratory section includes a directory of manufacturers of ergonomically correct laboratory equipment. There are also descriptions of exercises and stretches to help reduce fatigue from prolonged computer use.

### *HEART HEALTH FOR WOMEN*

Most American women aren't aware of the health threat posed by heart disease. It's the #1 killer of American women — 1 in 2 women in the United States will die of heart disease or stroke. By comparison, 1 in 30 American women will die of breast cancer.



The newly updated edition of the **Healthy Heart Handbook for Women**, which offers women an easy-to-use one-stop source for the latest information about how to lower their risk of heart disease, is now available online as a PDF document at <http://www.nih.gov/news/WordonHealth/aug2003/womensheart.htm>. This 106-page book provides new information on women's heart disease and practical suggestions for reducing personal risk of heart-related problems. It includes updated information on preventing and controlling high blood pressure, keeping blood cholesterol levels healthy, and postmenopausal hormone therapy. There are also new tips on maintaining a healthy weight, following a nutritious and tasty eating plan, and finding enjoyable ways to get more physical activity. The handbook also includes information about the warning signs of heart attack in women, as well as how to act quickly to get help.

A chart on the introductory page describing the book offers a checklist of questions to help women assess their risk for heart disease.

### *YOUR DOCTOR HAS RECOMMENDED SURGERY*

The **American College of Surgeons (ACS)** has a publication series “When you need an operation ...” and it is now available online at [http://www.facs.org/public\\_info/operation/aboutbroch.html](http://www.facs.org/public_info/operation/aboutbroch.html). Surgical procedures described in these informative brochures include appendectomy, carotid endarterectomy, cataract surgery in adults, gallbladder removal, cesarean section, hysterectomy, hernia repair, D & C for miscarriage, D & C for uterine bleeding, prostatectomy, and tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy.

Each brochure, available as a PDF file, describes the anatomy of the part of the body for which surgery will be performed, the condition necessitating the surgery, symptoms associated with the condition, how the surgery will be performed, preparing for the surgery, recovery, and long-term results. Simple illustrations help clarify the descriptions.

While at the ACS site, read their very helpful brochures that offer advice on what to do when your doctor recommends surgery. These brochures cover important information such as who should do the surgery, should you seek a second opinion, giving informed consent, and how much will the surgery cost.

## **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.

**Depression and anxiety. The Johns Hopkins White Papers.** Karen L. Swartz and Simeon Margolis. Medletter Associates, Inc., 2003. 60 p. (ISBN 0-929661-17-6), \$24.95.

How effective are antidepressant medications? How do they compare to placebos? Can specific medications or medical disorders cause an individual's mood variations? What specific questions help to determine if one has an anxiety disorder?

These questions and a variety of depression and anxiety-related topics are discussed, in layman's terms, in this comprehensive, brief (only sixty pages in length), informative, but expensive paperbound book. Written by two physicians, one a psychiatrist, from Johns Hopkins University Medical School, the text provides an overview of symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, genetic factors, and prognosis of anxiety and depression. Within the text, there are highlighted features on topics such as medications that can affect mood, warning signs of suicide in the elderly, new treatments for depression, and an update on the effectiveness of St. John's wort. Technical terms, such as "intermittent claudication" and "postural hypotension," are defined within the text.

Also included are practical guidance on selecting a therapist, lists of leading psychiatric hospitals in the U.S., national mental health organizations and support groups, and a glossary.

This book is one of a series of twelve, timely, comprehensive paperbound consumer health "White Papers" published under the direction of the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, publisher of the Johns Hopkins Medical Letter: Health After Fifty newsletter for medical consumers. Each book focuses on a health topic of special interest to adults over fifty. In addition to the publication on depression and anxiety, there are reports on arthritis, back pain and osteoporosis, coronary heart disease, diabetes, digestive disorders, hypertension and stroke, lung disorders, memory, nutrition and weight control, prostate disorders, and vision. The books are updated each year to allow the inclusion of new research on causes and treatments.

**Shelter from the storm. Caring for a child with a life-threatening condition.** Joanne Hilden , Daniel R. Tobin, and Karen Lindsay. Perseus Publishing, 2003. 220 p.(ISBN 0-7382-0534-6), \$15.95 pap.

Two physicians, experienced in end-of-life care, have written an outstanding, readable, and compassionate guide to one of the most difficult circumstances any parent could ever face—the imminent death of a son or daughter from serious illness. Joanne Hilden, a physician who heads the Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Program at The Children's Hospital of the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio, and Dr. Daniel R. Tobin, director of the Advanced Illness Coordinated Care program at the V.A. Healthcare Network in Albany, New York have provided significant, realistic suggestions for coping effectively with this heart rending experience.

Their recommendations are based on ones they have gathered from parents who have experienced the death of a child and they use very brief case histories to illustrate their advice. Their suggestions place the parents more firmly in control of the situation as active, knowledgeable partners with the health care team, since "you as a parent know your child better than anyone."



In addition to providing medical details about end-of-life treatment and patient responses, the authors emphasize the importance of the parent caring for herself and for other family members as they prepare for what will, hopefully, be a peaceful and painless death. They encourage parents to express their own feelings and justifiable anger, to allow the dying child to participate in the farewell process, and to accept their parenting job as the best they could do under the circumstances.

The book includes resource list of organizations and suggestions for further reading.

**Straight from the Gut: Living with Crohn's Disease and Ulcerative Colitis.** Cliff Kalibjian. O'Reilly Patient Centered Guides, 2003. 432 p. (ISBN 0-596-50005-X), \$24.95.

Author Cliff Kalibjian has written a comprehensive, well organized, and extremely informative guide to experiencing Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis, two inflammatory bowel diseases that affect perhaps one million Americans. A Crohn's disease patient since age thirteen, Mr. Kalibjian provides a compassionate, well-informed approach to the practical aspects of these diseases, of great value to others with these diseases. His information is gathered from research studies and anonymously presented patient anecdotes. Citations to the research study articles are included in the book's notes.

In addition to a description of signs and symptoms of these diseases and their possible causes, the book includes explanations of the diagnostic process and tests, complications of the diseases, current treatments, diet and complementary therapies. There are illustrative drawings of the diseases' effect on the gastrointestinal system, and medical procedures and surgeries

A great deal of the book is devoted to recommendations on the practical aspects of living with inflammatory bowel disease: communicating effectively with hospital staff, maintaining family relationships and friendships, obtaining health insurance, coping at work, selecting a physician, seeking emotional support.

The book concludes with information about resource organizations for inflammatory bowel diseases, ostomy procedures, drug reimbursement, and employment rights, and a bibliography for readers on inflammatory bowel disease, drugs, patient-doctor relationships, hospitalization, and mind-body healing.

**Dr. Susan Love's Menopause and Hormone Book. Making Informed Choices.** Susan M. Love with Karen Lindsey. Three Rivers Press, 2003. 420 p. (ISBN 0-609-80996-2), \$15.95 pap.

Breast cancer research advocate Dr. Susan Love has revised her book **Dr. Susan Love's Hormone Book** to include information about recently published conclusions about hormone replacement therapy and its potential dangers. In addition to an explanation of menopause and its possible symptoms, the book includes cautions against categorizing and treating this normal part of aging as a medical condition. Advocating a proactive role for patients, Dr. Love discusses the types of clinical research in relation to the Women's Health Initiative Study. For each study discussed in the text, there is a reference to the medical journal article cited in the Notes section at the conclusion of the book.

Written in an informative but informal style, the text is interspersed with anecdotes about the personal experiences of herself and other women as they experience menopause, and with informal, humorous comments. ("No, cheesecake is not a good way to get calcium.")

She describes lifestyle changes that help to prevent diseases of aging, and discusses osteoporosis and the process of bone building and loss. There is a chapter on vitamins, supplements, herbs and other alternative forms of therapy as well as one about medications effective for preventing and treating osteoporosis, heart disease, and high blood pressure. One chapter focuses on specific types of hormones. The book concludes with a practical approach to the process of decision making on stopping or starting hormone replacement therapy—questions to help in evaluating its potential risks and benefits, and symptom and medical history questionnaires that assign values to particular responses.

The book's appendix includes an overview of the DASH diet recommended by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, a list of books, videos, and websites for additional information, organizations of alternative health practitioners, and a brief directory of health organizations.

Dr. Love plans to post updated information to her website at <http://www.susanlovemd.org/>.



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If you have questions about anything in the newsletter or about Healthnet services for Connecticut public libraries,  
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