Consumer Health Information on the Internet: Where to Look and What to Look Out For

Anne Beschnett
Liaison and Outreach Librarian
University of Minnesota Health Sciences Libraries
Today’s Topics

• Background information on consumer health information seeking and health literacy
• Evaluating online health information
• MedlinePlus
  – NIH Seniors Health
  – ClinicalTrials.gov
• Drug Resources
• Household Products Database
• Lists of other helpful resources
• Questions
Introduction

• Consumers want and need health information
• High quality consumer health information is freely available on the Internet
• Inaccurate and misleading information is also easily available on the Internet
• Information is being used by consumers to make decisions regarding health and health care
Health Literacy

• ‘The degree to which individuals can obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services they need to make appropriate health decisions.’

(Institute of Medicine, 2008 available at http://www.iom.edu/?id=31489)
Health Literacy in the U.S.

• National Assessment of Adult Literacy
  – 22% with Basic health literacy skills
  – 14% with Below Basic health literacy skills

(Kutner et al., 2006)
Health Literacy and Health Outcomes

• Lower rates of literacy/health literacy are associated with:
  – Poorer health status
  – Higher hospitalization rates
  – Lower use of preventive services
  – Less knowledgeable of disease management and health promoting behaviors

(Medical Library Association, 2008; Institute of Medicine (U.S.) Committee on Health Literacy, 2004)
Health Information and the Internet

• Millions of Americans use the Internet to search for health information
  – 80% of American Internet users (113 million adults) have searched for information on at least one of 17 health topics
  – On a typical day, 10 million American adults look online for health information
Health Information and the Internet

- **80 percent** of adult Internet users begin their search at a search engine in 2006.
- **75 percent** of adult Internet users do not consistently check the source and date of the health information they find on the Internet in 2006.

(Kutner et al., 2006)
Health Information and the Internet

• Abundant online health information
  – Searching can be time-consuming and frustrating
  – Not all online health information is high quality
  – Daunting even for experienced users
  – 2006 Pew survey identified feelings of being overwhelmed, frustrated, confused, or frightened
Helping Patrons Evaluate the Information They Find

- Source
- Quality
- Be cyberskeptical
- Evidence
- Currency
- Bias
- Privacy
- Consult with your health provider
- Look for the HON code


http://www.hon.ch/HONcode/Conduct.html
Helping Patrons Understand Medical Research

- MedlinePlus Guide to Understanding Medical Research
  - Provides tips for evaluating health research information from the media
  - Links out to information on how to read a research paper
Things to Keep In Mind

• Never give medical advice or interpret medical information
• Emphasize that online health information is not meant to diagnose or treat conditions
• Encourage communication with their health care provider
MedlinePlus.gov

- [http://medlineplus.gov/](http://medlineplus.gov/)
- A consumer health information website created by the National Library of Medicine (NLM) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH)
- Provides over 26,000 links to carefully selected Web resources on over 800 health topics
- Information gathered from over 1,000 government agencies and health-related organizations
- All selected resources must meet quality guidelines
MedlinePlus.gov

- MedlinePlus.gov includes
  - Medical Encyclopedia
  - Merriam-Webster Medical Dictionary
  - Drug and Supplement information
  - Interactive tutorials
  - Easy-to-Read materials
  - Resources in multiple languages
  - Surgery videos
NIH Senior Health

- [http://www.nihseniorhealth.gov](http://www.nihseniorhealth.gov)
- Website developed especially for older adults.
- Contains information, videos, quizzes and frequently asked questions on 43 aging-related health topics
- Features include adjustable text size, contrast function to make text more readable, talking function that will read aloud the text on the screen
- Accessible from MedlinePlus
ClinicalTrails.gov

- [www.clinicaltrials.gov](http://www.clinicaltrials.gov)
- Registry of federally and privately funded clinical trials in the U.S. and around the world
- Provides information on participation guidelines, locations, and contact information
- Accessible from MedlinePlus
Drugs.com

- www.drugs.com
- Provides information on over 24,000 prescription drugs, over-the-counter medicines, and natural products
- Interactions Checker will list any drug interactions and the significance of the interaction
- Pill Identifier searches for medications based on size, shape, imprint, color
National Library of Medicine Household Products Database

- Links over 9,000 consumer brands to health effects from Material Safety Data Sheets
- Designed to help answer questions such as
  - What are the chemical ingredients and their percentage in specific brands?
  - Which products contain specific chemical ingredients?
  - What are the acute and chronic effects of chemical ingredients in a specific brand?
Other Helpful Resources

- **Finding Health and Wellness @ the Library: A Consumer Health Toolkit for Library Staff**
  - [http://www.library.ca.gov/lds/docs/healthtoolkit.pdf](http://www.library.ca.gov/lds/docs/healthtoolkit.pdf)

- Developed through a partnership between the California State Library and the National Network of Libraries of Medicine, Pacific Southwest Region

- Six Sections
  - Core Competencies, Health Resources, Consumer Health Information Services, Technology and Health 2.0, Workplace Wellness, and Resources for Health Care Professionals
Other Helpful Resources

• **Top 100 List: Health Websites You Can Trust**
  - [http://caphis.mlanet.org/consumer/index.html](http://caphis.mlanet.org/consumer/index.html)
  - Consumer and Patient Health Information Section (CAPHIS) of the Medical Library Association

• **Resources for Personal Health Guide**
  - [http://www.biomed.lib.umn.edu/personalhealth](http://www.biomed.lib.umn.edu/personalhealth)
  - Personal health resources recommended by librarians at the Bio-Medical Library, University of Minnesota.
Other Helpful Resources

• Minnesota Health Information: A Guide to Health Care Quality and Cost in Minnesota
  • [http://www.minnesotahealthinfo.org](http://www.minnesotahealthinfo.org)
  • Minnesota Department of Health
    – Governor’s Health cabinet created to help all Minnesotans better understand health care options, costs, and quality.
Questions?

Contact Information

Anne Beschnett
besch015@umn.edu
612-625-9603

Bio-Medical Library Reference Desk
612-626-3260
References


