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HEALTHNET NEWS

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

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UPDATE

MEDICAL REFERENCE WORKSHOP

Healthnet will be presenting a medical reference workshop on October 27th at the Wallingford Public Library. This is a program for public librarians and will feature a discussion about conducting an effective medical reference interview and a review of important print and online sources to use for specific questions. The registration form for this workshop can be found at <http://library.uhc.edu/departm/hnet/refregis.pdf>. Complete the form and return it to the address listed. The registration deadline is Wednesday, October 20th. Register early – space is limited.

PUBMED WORKSHOPS SCHEDULED

Two sessions on searching PubMed will be offered in October at the Middletown Library Service Center. The sessions will be on Wednesday, October 6 and Wednesday, October 20 from 9:00 a.m. – Noon. The teacher for the training sessions will be Donna Berryman, Outreach Coordinator, National Network of Libraries of Medicine, New England Region. Unlike the sessions held in the spring which were only open for public librarians, these two sessions will be for public librarians as well as hospital, health sciences, academic, and special librarians. The registration form for these sessions can be found at <http://library.uhc.edu/departm/hnet/pubmedregis.pdf>. Complete the form and return it to the address indicated. The registration deadline for both is Friday, October 1st. Register early – space is limited.

USING THE INTERNET TO SEARCH FOR CONSUMER HEALTH INFORMATION – A WORKSHOP

Using the Internet to find answers to medical questions from your patrons? Concerned about locating the most authoritative websites for this type of information? Plan on attending the workshop **Using the Internet to Answer Consumer Health Questions** Tuesday, November 9th from 9:00 a.m. to Noon at the Middletown Library Service Center. This hands-on workshop will help librarians use detailed criteria to evaluate individual websites and to locate the best sites to answer specific kinds of questions. Alberta Richetelle, Healthnet Program Director, and Judith Kronick, Healthnet Librarian will teach the workshop. Register early for this workshop since space is limited. The registration form for this workshop can be found at <http://library.uhc.edu/departm/hnet/interegis.pdf>. Complete the form and return it to the address indicated. The registration deadline is Wednesday, November 3rd.

NEW MEDICAL NEWS LINKS

As mentioned in the last issue of Healthnet News, the database Biomedicine and Health in the News (BHN) has discontinued publication. Although the BHN information is still available at <http://library.uhc.edu/bhn>, it has not been updated since March 2004 and is not directly linked from Healthnet's homepage.

In place of BHN, a new page, **Current Medical News**, has been added that has links to a variety of medical news sources to help individuals keep up with medical and scientific research reported in the media. The page is linked from Healthnet's homepage at <http://library.uhc.edu/departm/hnet> and selecting the link "Current Medical News" or may be accessed directly at <http://library.uhc.edu/departm/hnet/healthnews.html>.



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The list of reliable online news sources includes several related articles on understanding popular medical news stories, background information on the different types of clinical research and the significance of types of risks reported in news stories, and a publication to help consumers understand how nutrition research becomes news..

There are seven different news links listed including Reuters Health, CNN Health, and Aetna IntelliHealth . Three of the news sources offer free daily or weekly delivery of news to your email address – a convenient way to keep up with current medical research.

NETNEWS

QUALITY OF CARE IN CONNECTICUT HOSPITALS



In the Spring of 2002, Connecticut passed legislation that created a quality of care program to provide standardized, valid information to the public about the quality of care in Connecticut’s adult general acute care hospitals. The program requires hospitals to collect and report quality of care information to **the Department of Public Health (DPH)**. The data becomes part of a public report that compares all licensed hospitals in the state. As a starting point, hospitals are required to provide information on quality of care to patients who have been diagnosed with a heart attack, heart failure, or pneumonia – three common and costly medical conditions for which people are admitted to the hospital. The complete report for these three conditions can be found at <http://www.dph.state.ct.us/OPPE/Quality/hospperfcomp.htm> . This report provides comparisons of the reporting hospitals in Connecticut for the period July 2003 through September 2003.

Performance rates are collected for ten clinical measures that focus on well-established treatments and generally accepted recommended care based on medical evidence. For heart attack patients, as an example, hospitals reported on ten performance measures that include: giving aspirin within 24 hours of arrival; giving a prescription for aspirin upon discharge, giving an ACE inhibitor if heart function is impaired; giving a beta blocker within 24 hours of arrival; and giving a prescription for a beta-blocker upon discharge. The ten measures are combined to give a composite score for each of the three medical conditions.

Connecticut hospitals’ median performance rates are compared to rates of hospitals in the United States. Overall, Connecticut hospitals are doing better than the U.S on seven of the ten clinical measures. They still fall short, however, of achieving the goal of 100% on most of the measures. Put another way, there are still gaps between the care that could be given and the care actually being delivered.

Consumers can use this information to educate themselves about the quality of care in their local hospital and for talking to their doctor about choosing a hospital for medical care. Family members can also use this information to ask questions when a loved one is in the hospital receiving care.

NEW BOOKLET HELPS PATIENTS UNDERSTAND RADIATION THERAPY

The **American Society for Therapeutic Radiation Oncology (ASTRO)** has recently published a new patient information booklet “Radiation Therapy for Cancer: Facts to Help Patients Make an Information Decision”. The brochure is available online in HTML and PDF formats at http://www.astro.org/patient/treatment_information/ . The brochure joins the other ASTRO publications “Radiation Oncology Treatment Team”, “Radiation Therapy for Breast Cancer”, and “Radiation Therapy for Lung Cancer”. Each brochure is approximately 15 pages in length and may be downloaded from the ASTRO website.

The newest brochure, “Radiation Therapy for Cancer” provides background information about cancer and describes radiation therapy and how it is used to treat cancer. It also describes the different types of radiation therapy and answers concerns about the safety of the therapy. Detailed information is given on what happens before, during and after treatment and helpful advice is given to help patients care for themselves during therapy.

An important part of learning more about radiation treatment is knowing what questions to ask the doctor. The booklet lists twenty-three questions to help patients more fully understand the goal of therapy and its benefits, side effects, and risks. There is also brief information about clinical research trials with the names, addresses, and contact information where patients could get more information.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR BREAST CANCER PATHOLOGY REPORT



The non-profit breast cancer organization **Breastcancer.org**, has developed a new publication to help breast cancer patients understand the pathology report of the breast biopsy. The twenty-five page PDF version of the booklet may be downloaded free http://www.breastcancer.org/pathology_intro.html. The publication is available in English and Spanish. A free print copy may also be ordered by filling out an online order form.

A report is written anytime tissue is removed from the body to check for cancer. This report, called a pathology report, has detailed information about the results of the studies of the tissue that was removed. Pathology reports can be confusing to read because the language used is very technical and different labs may use different terms to describe the same thing.

This helpful booklet cautions patients to be sure they have all the information before making a decision about treatment. Different tests may take longer than others and the same laboratory may do not all the tests. Patients are also advised not to focus on any one piece of information but to look at the whole picture, which will help in decision-making about treatment.

A pathology report has several distinct sections. These are explained clearly and concisely in the booklet. The booklet also explains that the report will tell if the tumor is cancerous, whether the cancer is invasive, the size of the tumor, if there are cancer cells in the lymph or blood vessels, how fast the cancer cells are growing, and if the cancer cells have genes that are not normal. There is also an explanation of the different types of breast cancer and how and why breast cancer is staged. Staging of breast cancer tells the extent of the cancer within the body and whether the disease has spread from the original site to other parts of the body. Knowing the stage of the cancer also guide what treatment plan will be used.

This informative booklet, written in easy to understand language, will help patients make sense of the information in their pathology report and thus make more informed decisions about their treatment options.

IMPORTANCE OF BONE HEALTH FOR YOUNG GIRLS

The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** recently launched a new website **Powerful Bones, Powerful Girls** at <http://www.cdc.gov/powerfulbones/parents/index.html>. This new resource is part of the National Bone Health Campaign (NBHC) to promote optimal bone health in girls aged 9-12, and thus reduce their risk of osteoporosis later in life. The site has information for parents to help their daughters develop lifelong bone-healthy habits. Although geared for 9-12 year olds, the information is also applicable to older and younger girls.

The site includes a comprehensive list of foods and their calcium content, a shopping list with calcium rich foods, recipes that are high in calcium, activities that enhance bone health, and advice on how to encourage young girls to adopt activities that can increase bone health. Special situations also addressed such as what to do if a child is lactose intolerant or a finicky eater and if it's possible to get too much calcium.

There is also a special section designed just for young girls to teach them about the importance of developing bone-healthy habits. This colorful section's guide is a cartoon character named Carla who connects with young girls by talking about her favorite foods, hobbies, and physical activities, and her career goals. Carla describes the structure of bones and why it's important that they remain strong. There are several quizzes on bone health, games to play (one in which the player helps Carla select calcium rich foods), advice on how to read food labels, and sample calcium rich menus for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks.

NEW MEDICINES IN DEVELOPMENT

Perhaps someone has told you about a new medication that Pfizer is testing that may treat a disease affecting a close family member. You may be wondering where in the development process that potentially helpful new drug is.

A website, **New Medicines in Development**, published at <http://www.phrma.org/newmedicines/> by the **Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA)**, the national trade association of large "research-based pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies" in the U. S., provides information on the current status of new drugs in development.



The drug names of medications currently in development for specific disorders may be found by selecting the name of a disease from an alphabetical pull-down menu. The search results include drug name, pharmaceutical company producing the drug, and current development status. The status refers to the clinical trial phase of the drug being tested. A hyperlink for the current phase designation leads to an explanation of clinical trial phases, e.g. "Clinical trials, phase II" (are) "controlled trials of approximately 100 to 500 volunteer patients...(that) assess a drug's effectiveness."

If you know the name, or a portion of the name, of the new medication you may type it in a "search by drug name" box. You may search by either generic name or proprietary (brand) name.

It is also possible to search by company name to see what drugs each pharmaceutical company is currently developing. There is an alphabetical drop-down menu for company names so it is not necessary to remember the multitude of company names nor their spellings.

There is also information about recently approved medications. Charts, in Adobe Acrobat format, detail new drugs approved in 2001, 2002, and 2003. The charts list drugs alphabetically by product name. Each chart includes the drug's indication (use), company name and contact name, and date of U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval.

Names of the member pharmaceutical companies, contact information, and hyperlinks to their websites are included under the category "Who We Are." In addition, on the website there are details about each company's patient assistance program, a plan that provides limited quantities of free or discounted medications to patients who meet specific low income and insurance qualifications.

Wish you could have some details about the results of those clinical drug trials listed on this website? Stay tuned. According to the August 26, 2004 New York Times ("Maker of Antidepressant Drug to Release All Trial Results."), GlaxoSmithKline "agreed to post on its Web site the results of all clinical trials involving its drugs" as part of a court settlement in a case initiated by the New York Attorney General. Other companies may follow their lead.



FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

Dr. Gavin's Health Guide for African Americans. How to Keep Yourself and Your Children Well. James R. Gavin III, M.D. and Sherrye Landrum. Small Steps Press, 2004. 278 p. (ISBN 1-58040-204-6 pbk.) \$14.95.

Taking the role of wise, encouraging, and friendly uncle, Dr. James R. Gavin, president of Morehouse School of Medicine, provides important, current information about disease prevention and reducing obesity, directed to African-Americans. Written in the first person, using an easygoing, conversational style, Dr. Gavin coaxes readers to exercise more and include increased amounts of fruit, vegetables, and whole grains in their diets. He encourages readers to make gradual but drastic changes in a modern lifestyle that emphasizes fast food and sedentary habits.

Dr. Gavin emphasizes the important influence of adult health habits on children and encourages readers to improve their health habits for the children in their lives as well as for themselves. The book includes many specific, practical suggestions for increasing the amount of daily walking and exercising, and for eating healthier meals. There are descriptions of a warm-up routine, number of calories burned after one hour of specific exercises, suggestions for cutting fat while cooking, a sample healthy meal plan, and a chart that indicates risky weights for diabetes.

There are chapters on high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, and cancer. Each chapter concludes with a list of organizations, books, magazines, and websites that provide additional resources. One chapter recommends effective ways to communicate with a doctor and suggests specific questions to ask the doctor when she prescribes a new medication.

The Etiquette of Illness. What to Say When You Can't Find the Words. Susan P. Halpern. Bloomsbury, 2004. 236 p. (ISBN 1-58234-383-7)

Susan Halpern's experiences as a social worker, psychotherapist, and cancer patient have enriched this sensitive, realistic guide to communicating with friends and relatives facing serious illness. Founder of the New York Cancer Help program and staff associate at the Commonwealth Cancer Help Program, she has a great deal of experience working with very ill patients and their families.

In their efforts to be helpful, friends and acquaintances often mistakenly avoid the obvious subject of the patient's condition or ask insensitive, probing questions. In her book, Ms. Halpern illustrates appropriate ways to communicate with patients by retelling, in brief vignettes, the experiences and reactions of patients whose friends' and family's words have hurt or helped immensely. She emphasizes that individuals have different communication needs. She suggests diplomatic ways to determine how to ask questions of a patient and convey support to her. She states that one's supportive presence, without words, may be sufficient.

Because doctors have different styles of communicating a patient's condition and prognosis, the book includes anecdotes about how differing communication types have affected a patient and her family positively or negatively. She writes about patients who learned how to talk effectively with an uncommunicative doctor.

This compassionate book also includes sections on explaining illness and death to children, and end of life experiences.

The new Harvard guide to women's health. Karen J. Carlson M.D., Stephanie A. Eisenstat M.D., Terra Ziporyn Ph.D. Harvard University Press, 2004. 688 p. (ISBN 0-674-01282-8 cloth, ISBN 0-674-01343-3, pap.) \$37.40 hardcover, \$24.95 pap.

Since the 1996 publication of the first edition of this comprehensive overview of women's health concerns, there have been new medical discoveries and developments in treatments. Reports from the Women's Health Initiative have discussed dangers of estrogen replacement therapy. New diagnostic technologies are more frequently used. Both the first edition and the updated guide were written by three women authors, two physicians affiliated with Harvard Medical School, and a medical journalist.

The book is comprised of more than 300 topics, each discussed in two to four pages using consumer-friendly language. The topics range from premenstrual syndrome to artificial sweeteners, calcium, antianxiety drugs, dilation and curettage, kegel exercises, and ovarian cysts. Most topics and a great deal of the text are the same as the first edition, but the authors have added information about airbags, and antiphospholipid antibody syndrome and have updated the discussion of cholesterol and dieting, including a chart of popular diets and information about weight loss medications.

Subjects are listed alphabetically in the table of contents. The index includes entries for main topics, cross-references to relevant main topics, and both generic and brand names of drugs discussed in the text. A topically arranged resource guide directs readers to health organizations that may be of assistance.

Port in the Storm. How to Make a Medical Decision and Live to Tell About It. Cole A. Miller LifeLine Press, 2004. 266 p. (ISBN 0-89526-132-4), \$16.95.

Basing his recommendations on extensive experience counseling patients who are deciding among treatment options, Dr. Cole A. Miller, a neurosurgeon at Southwestern Medical School in Dallas, Texas and cancer survivor, has written a thoughtful, basic, patient-oriented guide to medical decision making. According to Dr. Miller, medical decision-making is a "complex art form."

His six part plan recommends identification of options, recognition of tradeoffs among treatments, discovery of statistical data related to options, interpretation and evaluation of data, gathering personal beliefs related to treatment, and considering the treatment's subjective meaning to the patient. His book emphasizes that decision-making involves more than facts. The patient's comfort level with the chosen treatment and with its potential side effects are important considerations.

He states that the patient's physician is an important resource for information gathering and recommendations but warns that the physician's professional or personal preference may be reflected in the way she presents options to the patient. Patients bear a great, and sometimes quite stressful, responsibility because, in the current health care system, treatment decisions are ultimately made by the patient.

To help readers in identifying treatment options, the first step of the decision-making process, Dr. Miller includes a detailed chapter on sources of medical literature, including brief descriptions of specific medical textbooks and reference books. He also describes recommended websites and includes guidelines for using medical websites effectively. A brief explanation of the use of the important database PubMed, the National Library of Medicine's online index to medical literature, is quite helpful, but omits the use of the Medical Subject Headings controlled vocabulary for searching. The value of seeking help from knowledgeable librarians is mentioned more than once!

He reminds patients that no decision is risk-free and that "there is no one right answer." A valid choice may involve compromise.

The Sports Medicine Patient Advisor. Pierre Rouzier, M.D. McKesson Health Solutions LLC., 2004. Second edition. 357 p. (ISBN 0-9671831-1-1). \$47.95.

"What can I do at home to help myself?" is a question often asked by athletes with sports injuries. This easy-to-read collection of injury explanations and home exercises is an extremely helpful resource to help fulfill this request. Written by a doctor who is a team physician for the University of Massachusetts, it includes, in each brief two to three page chapter, a definition of the injury, an explanation of how it occurs, its symptoms, methods of diagnosis, and treatment. There are recommendations for patient self-care and suggestions for prevention of future injury. Nearly every chapter concludes with instructions for suggested rehabilitation exercises for the specific condition, illustrated with line drawings.

Written in layman's terms, it was published to serve as a source of patient education handouts for physicians to copy and distribute to patients. The beginning chapters are grouped by body area. They discuss conditions such as concussion, carpal tunnel syndrome, wrist fracture, herniated disk, anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injury, and meniscal (cartilage) tear. The book concludes with a section on nutrition that includes specifics on a precompetition meal, sources of iron in the diet, fluids and hydration, creatine, and sources of calcium. The book is enhanced by a general medical section with information on finding running shoes that fit appropriately, heat therapy, how to use a cane and crutches, and exercise-induced asthma, and strength training exercises.



*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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