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HEALTHNET NEWS

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

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UPDATE

NEW WORKSHOP OFFERED BY HEALTHNET

On May 6, 2008, Healthnet staff offered a new 3 hour workshop on “Navigating the Health Care System” at the Middletown Library Service Center computer lab. This first-time offering was a huge success judging by the evaluations by the attendees. This hands on workshop demonstrated websites with reliable information on: obtaining health insurance; Medicare and Medicaid; managed care plans; evaluating physicians and hospitals; communicating with your doctor; long term care; privacy rights; and end of life decisions. Attendees had an opportunity to practice their skills in locating information by answering questions on each of the topics.

Plans are to offer this class in the fall. An announcement will be posted on Conntech and individual emails will be sent to public libraries.

NET NEWS

NEW PATIENT INFORMATION DATABASE..AND IT'S FREE!

Health information seekers now have free access to the online **UpToDate** collection of more than 300 patient information articles at <http://www.uptodate.com/patients/index.html>

Topics may be selected from a list of more than twenty categories including Endocrine System and Hormones, Digestive Disease, Pregnancy, Cancer, and Children’s Health. Written on a twelfth grade level, the articles address specific conditions such as depression in adolescents, vasculitis, prostate cancer screening, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and angina. There are also articles on treatments such as coronary artery bypass surgery, cardioversion for cardiac arrhythmias, metered dose inhaler therapy for asthma, and recommendations for maintaining good health. The articles include sections on risk factors, causes, diagnostic procedures, prevention, complications, and treatments.

The collection of articles is also searchable by health condition, symptom, diagnostic test, treatment, or medication, by either brand or generic name.

The articles are “evidence-based” and accompanied by references to research articles on the topic. They are written by physicians who specialize in treating the condition and reviewed by editors who are physicians or nurses. The authors of each article are named and their hospital or university affiliation is included. Authors and editors update patient information topics every four months.

Although the collection of patient articles is available for free, health consumers may also subscribe to the health care professional section of the database for a limited time period, a week or month, in order to access more technical, in-depth information on a health topic



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CONNECTICUT PARENT ADVOCACY CENTER NEWSLETTER

The **Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center**, at <http://cpacinc.org/index.htm> , a nonprofit organization that offers free guidance and counseling to parents of children with disabilities, from birth to age 26 years of age, has resumed publishing *Speak Out*, an online newsletter for parents.

The Spring 2008 issue includes an article on transitioning to kindergarten and guidance for parents trying to determine if a child is ready for that educational experience. The transition from preschool to kindergarten, especially for children with disabilities, is begun in May in many school districts in Connecticut.

Another article explains Response to Intervention, a new model for early identification of children who may be in need of extra assistance and instruction in the school setting.

There are suggested important questions for parents to ask at an Individualized Education Program planning meeting with school personnel. This meeting begins the process of obtaining special education services for a student.

An additional article describes availability of free Supplemental Education Services tutoring. There are also suggestions for specific questions to ask of a tutor before hiring her, as well as information on the challenges of postsecondary education for young adults with disabilities. A recent college graduate with ADHD relates his successful experience in asserting himself to secure extra help at college.

Parents needing additional information on these topics or individualized telephone counseling about their children's needs may contact the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center at 1-800-445-CPAC.

MORE PARENT ADVOCACY INFORMATION....

The parent advocacy organization, **SPED*NET** of Wilton, Connecticut, has published a new online advocacy guide for parents requesting special education services for their children, entitled "Bringing Knowledge to the Table: How to be an Effective Advocate for your Child: A Guide to Special Services in Connecticut." The 48 page book may be downloaded at no charge at www.spednetwilton.org/handbook/handbook.pdf . The handbook guides parents step-by-step through the laws and procedures they must follow in Connecticut. It includes blank forms that may be printed for individual use.

DRUG SAFETY...KEEPING UP TO DATE



The U.S. Food and Drug Administration determines when a medication is effective and safe to market and distribute in the U.S. The agency reviews pre-clinical data on testing in laboratory animals and evaluates the results of clinical research with human subjects. What happens after the drug is approved by the FDA, prescribed by doctors, and distributed by pharmacists throughout the country? The FDA also bears responsibility for monitoring the ongoing safety of drugs the agency approves.

An FDA Consumer Update at <http://www.fda.gov/consumer/updates/druginfo041108.html> describes the specific ways the FDA communicates medication safety risks to the public as the agency becomes aware of them.

Public Health Advisories, each describing warnings, correct uses, and precautions discovered for specific drugs, are posted chronologically on the FDA website at <http://www.fda.gov/cder/news/pubpress.htm> .

An alphabetical index by names of drugs that have been the focus of a Public Health Advisory is available at <http://www.fda.gov/cder/drug/drugsafety/DrugIndex.htm> . "Serious adverse effects" and quality problems discovered about specific drugs may be reported to the FDA's MedWatch program by both consumers and health professionals using online forms available at <http://www.fda.gov/medwatch/how.htm> . A chronological list of drug (and food) withdrawals and safety alerts appears at <http://www.fda.gov/opacom/7alerts.html> .

The FDA's Consumer Health Information website at <http://www.fda.gov/consumer/default.htm> includes links to a variety of health and medication safety information. The terms used to describe each of these FDA safety reports and alerts are defined at <http://www.fda.gov/consumer/updates/drugterms041108.html> .

HEALTH INFORMATION IN MANY LANGUAGES

Perhaps you have discovered a number of reliable sources with health information in Spanish. But when a library user requests consumer health information in Arabic or Bosnian or Russian or Chinese or Polish, where can you turn for information to offer in these and many other languages?

The National Library of Medicine's free Medlineplus consumer health website at <http://medlineplus.gov/> has launched a new feature that includes health information written for health consumers in over 40 languages. To get to this special feature, select "Multiple Languages" from the bottom of the left-hand index on the MedlinePlus main page. The website also has many articles written in Spanish.

Articles are listed by name of the language and by topic. Currently, only a limited number of articles are offered in some languages. Only four topics appear on the list of articles in Bengali and only twenty-one articles are available in French Creole. In the entire multilingual collection of articles, there are more than 2,500 links to information on almost 250 health topics.

The multilingual collection is also searchable by typing the name of the medical condition and the language desired next to each other in the search box. A search on "Parkinson's Disease Somali" yields an alphabetical English list of links to articles in Somali, including one about Parkinson's disease.

A "Languages" box appears on specific Health Topic pages written in English. On the Prenatal Testing Health Topics page, the "Languages" box links to articles in thirteen languages, including Spanish, Vietnamese, and Brazilian Portuguese.



"HELPING YOUR OVERWEIGHT CHILD"

The number of overweight children and adolescents in the U.S. has been increasing. A National Center for Health Statistics report classified 19.5 percent of children (ages 6 to 11) and 17 percent of adolescents (ages 12 to 19) as overweight.

How may concerned parents of overweight children help their youngsters? An easy-to-read online booklet, "Help Your Overweight Child," published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services at http://win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/over_child.htm, highlights specific recommendations for parents concerned about their child's weight. It advises against placing a child on a weight-loss diet without consulting the child's physician and encourages the parent to "accept your child at any weight."

It does, however, offer specific suggestions for healthier nutrition and exercise habits. The booklet recommends increasing fruit and vegetable consumption, reducing visits to fast food restaurants, having a child eat breakfast every day, planning nutritious meals and eating them as a family, and introducing a new food many times. It encourages parents to plan energetic chores and activities for the family, set a positive example by exercising themselves, increase a child's daily exercise time gradually, and allow the child to choose active sports they are comfortable with.

The booklet concludes with links to colorful, interactive, child-friendly websites that promote healthy eating habits and enjoyable physical activity.



FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

The following titles are recommended for public libraries and other libraries providing consumer health information services. They are not part of the UConn Health Center Library collection.

Choices in Breast Cancer Treatment. Medical Specialists and Cancer Survivors Tell You What You Need to Know. Kenneth D. Miller, editor. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. 405 p. (ISBN 0-8018-8684-8 hardcover \$45.00 ISBN 0-8018-8685-6 paperback \$18.95).

Medical oncologist and Yale medical professor Dr. Kenneth D. Miller has gathered the expertise of a number of his colleagues around the country to describe current breast cancer treatments and reconstructive surgery. Written by individual physicians and surgeons, the chapters discuss diagnostic procedures, risk factors, surgical procedures, radiation therapy, hormonal therapy, chemotherapy, patient decision-making, recovery, and risks of recurrence. The explanations are detailed and straightforward, often enhanced by illustrations.

Variables such as tumor size, cancer type, and cancer stage affect the ultimate choice of treatment. Dr. Miller also emphasizes the important role of the patient in making treatment decisions. According to Dr. Miller, unlike emergency surgery for appendicitis, “in the treatment of breast cancer, many of the choices are between different options that are equally effective” and involve “personal preference.” Connecticut cancer surgeon Dr. Peter J. Deckers states that “surgeons ...are here to offer guidance to our patients, not to make all the decisions.” Dr. Miller concludes that “treatment planning.....requires good medical information, and...also requires emotional strength.”

After the in depth explanations of treatment options, the remaining, extensive, portion of the book incorporates the experiences of breast cancer patients and survivors, some of them health professionals who treat or counsel breast cancer patients.

In the final chapter, Dr. Miller briefly describes the serious illnesses of his wife and daughter and concludes “cancer is a treatable disease and hope is a powerful prescription that doctors can give their patients.”

2008 Consumer’s Guide to Hearing Aids. James Wilson Group Strategic Solutions, L.P., 2008. Distributed by the Hearing Loss Association of America. 7910 Woodmont Avenue, Suite 1200, Bethesda, MD 20814. 31 p. \$4.65.

Hearing loss can be disabling for an individual, not only because this important sense is diminished, but also because of the psychological and social effects of being unable to communicate with others and understand what is happening in the immediate social environment. Some people withdraw from social events as their hearing worsens.

Hearing aids can restore a degree of hearing for many and improve an individual’s ability to participate in social situations... but will not bring an individual’s hearing ability back to normal.

For an individual considering the use of a hearing aid, the array of hearing aids available for purchase can present overwhelming choices. There is a wide range of types of hearing aids, brands, and prices.

The **2008 Consumer’s Guide to Hearing Aids** provides photos and descriptions of hearing aid shell styles, a chart, including brand names and models, that indicates features of analog hearing aids, questions to ask when purchasing a digital hearing aid, an explanation of hearing aid technology, advantages of wearing hearing aids in both ears, a glossary of hearing aid terms, and charts that describe features of specific entry level, basic, advanced and premium digital hearing aids.

The booklet may be purchased online at the website of the Hearing Loss Association of America at www.hearingloss.org

Food Fights: winning the nutritional challenges of parenthood armed with insight, humor, and a bottle of ketchup

Laura A. Jana and Jennifer Shu. American Academy of Pediatrics, 2008. 250 p. (ISBN 978-1-58110-244-4), \$14.95.

Drs. Laura Jana and Jennifer Shu, experienced pediatricians and mothers, are convinced that, despite the increase in fast food meals consumed over the last two decades and the increased number of obese children in the U.S., it is still possible to persuade children to eat healthy, nutritious meals and to avoid many food conflicts between parents and children. Using a lighthearted style, and the insight of parents who have experienced food challenges with their own children, they offer many practical suggestions for instilling lifelong, healthy nutritional habits. The book's contents were reviewed by other physicians.

Their book combines nutrition information with guidance in parenting skills, since the healthiest meal doesn't help to nourish a child if the child does not eat it. They remind parents that their own eating habits are an important influence on their children. They describe ten "Palatable Peacekeeping Strategies" for encouraging children to participate in healthy eating, beginning with "Vow Not To Fight Over Food."

The importance of specific parent-child battles over food are designated by a "four fork" rating system. Only a problem rated with all four forks is worth warring over.

The text includes milestones for nutrition-related behavior (remaining at the table during an entire dinner, holding their own spoon, eating solid foods, etc.), guidance in determining body mass index, information about appropriate vitamin use, suggestions for stress-free shopping trips, and advice about feeding children when they are ill. There is a whole chapter about recommended food-related storybooks for children (including Eating the Alphabet by Lois Ehlert, Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle, and How to Eat Fried Worms by Thomas Rockwell.)

I Need an Operation...Now What? A Patient's Guide to a Safe and Successful Outcome. Thomas R. Russell.

Thomson Healthcare Inc., 2008. 118 p. (ISBN 1-56356-700-6), \$19.95.

Told by a physician who is both "an insider in the profession of surgery" as well as a patient who has experienced two operations, this is a brief, clear explanation of the steps patients need to take as they select a physician, participate in an initial meeting with a surgeon, prepare themselves both "physically and emotionally" for the surgery, experience the surgical procedure, and recuperate from the operation. Dr. Russell, executive director of the American College of Surgeons, national professional association of surgeons, confesses that even physicians and other health care professionals experience anxiety when they face surgery. He emphasizes that "no matter how good the ...surgeon," a patient "must become an active participant in [the] operation" and "take control" of the situation by becoming well informed about the surgery and following the surgeon's recommendations for the recovery process.

The book does not discuss specific types of surgery. Instead, it serves as a generic patient guide to the surgical experience, with information common to all surgeries. It reminds patients to ask important questions of the surgeon such as, "Why do I need an operation? What will happen if I don't have the operation now? What are the risks and benefits? What kind of surgery were you trained to do?" Each chapter lists specific questions to ask the surgeon related to that chapter's topic.

The author includes "insider's tips" to the medical world, based on his experiences as a surgeon and as a patient. In addition, patients, whose full names are disclosed, make recommendations, retell their experiences selecting a surgeon, preparing for surgery, and recovering. ("If you don't want surprises, ask a lot of questions....You should not be any less informed because you're having outpatient surgery.")

A glossary at the end of the book defines less familiar words such as "adhesion," "advance directive," and "thoracoscopy" as well as better known ones such as "spinal anesthesia" and "tonsillectomy." In the appendix, there is a guide to surgical specialties and surgical specialty organizations.

Additional resources about communicating with a physician appear on Navigating the Health Care System, a resource guide on the Healthnet website, at <http://library.uchc.edu/departm/hnet/hcbib.html> . It includes an online publication entitled, "Having Surgery? What You Need to Know," published by the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

Raising Baby Green. The Earth-Friendly Guide to Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Baby Care. Alan Greene with Jeanette Pavini and Theresa Foy DiGeronimo. John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2007. 306 p. \$16.95.

Want to be sure your new arrival is raised in a healthier, “greener” environment?

Pediatrician Dr. Alan Greene envisions a new generation of citizens supporting a sustainable, “green” environment. His practical, helpful Guide describes changes a parent can make to their home and nutritional habits to support this healthier environment even before their baby is born. Parents who advocate the concept of a “green” environment but lack the knowledge to implement suitable changes in their lives will find this Guide especially informative.

From pregnancy to birth to infancy, the book includes numerous ideas for reducing the effects of environmental toxins, saving energy, and preserving natural resources. Dr. Greene encourages parents unfamiliar with the specifics of promoting a healthier, “greener” environment to take gradual steps in this process, using the book’s guidelines for reducing waste and providing a safer environment for an infant. Among his suggestions are avoiding hair coloring while pregnant or nursing, selecting organic cloth diapers and clothing for a newborn, using cleansing products for the baby manufactured without artificial colors or synthetic fragrances, avoiding volatile organic compounds in household products such as paints, wood preservatives, and disinfectants, and asking specific questions of a potential pediatrician that will help determine if her outlook on childcare is ‘green.’”

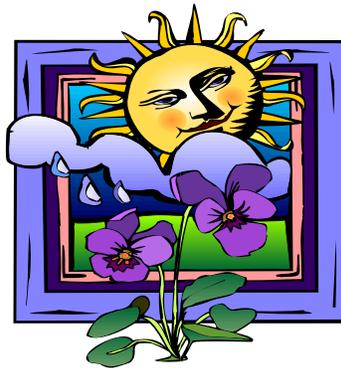
Among the featured topics on Dr. Greene’s parenting website at <http://www.drgreene.com/12.html> are “Environmental Health” and “Nutrition and Organics.”

Your Critically Ill Child. Life and Death Choices Parents Must Face. Christopher M. Johnson. New Horizon Press, 2007. 212 p. (ISBN 0-88282-284-5), \$15.95.

Using the actual stories of ten critically ill children whom he treated, Dr. Christopher Johnson dramatically portrays the extremely difficult experiences of families whose children were in life or death situations. Some of these children recovered and now live healthy lives, some did not.

The modern medical technology Dr. Johnson describes has increased the chances of recovery for seriously ill children. However, he also emphasizes the important role of parents. He encourages parents to be “alert and active participants in the process of obtaining the best possible care when their child becomes critically ill or injured.” He emphasizes to parents that it is the doctor’s responsibility to explain the child’s situation to them, in clear, understandable terms. He includes “Crucial Advice for Parents,” based the chapter’s narration, at the conclusion of each chapter. E.g. “Keep a record of who is caring for your child, what is being done, and why.” “Take care of yourself so that you can properly care for your child; get adequate rest and nutrition.”

An engaging storyteller, Dr. Johnson uses his narratives to explain modern medical treatments, the conditions that caused the children to become critically ill, and the physiology of the child’s body systems.



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