

Consumer health information

Compiled by Susan Murray

The Challenge of Providing Consumer Health Information Services in Public Libraries

This 26-page booklet (<http://www.healthlit.org/pdfs/AAASFINAL.pdf>), produced by the Healthy People 2010 Library Initiative, was funded by the [US] National Institutes of Health. This 5-year project is designed to “provide minority groups and other consumers easy access to current, reliable information on selected health topics at their local public libraries”. Seven plain-language booklets explaining the science behind chronic illnesses of particular significance to minority groups (including diabetes, hypertension, and asthma) are planned.

The report also includes a review of the current literature regarding how public libraries disseminate health information to the public, a list of model consumer health libraries, and health-related Web sites for further information. Although the focus is on US services, the Consumer Health Information Service (CHIS) is included in this listing.

Information prescriptions

http://www.nlm.nih.gov/news/press_releases/acpfpressrel04.html

In April, the American College of Physicians Foundation (ACPF) and the National Library of Medicine (NLM) embarked on a project where internists will write prescriptions to recommend MedlinePlus (<http://www.medlineplus.gov>), a trustworthy Web site of free medical information, to their patients.

Internists who participated in the pilot programs for this project said that MedlinePlus empowers patients (54%), explains difficult concepts and procedures (43%), and improves patient–physician communication (42%).

“Physicians have always known that an informed patient who takes an active role is a ‘better’ patient,” noted NLM Director Donald A.B. Lindberg, MD. “We believe that both patients and their doctors will welcome this additional medical tool — good medical information — in their continuing efforts to provide good health care.”

New periodicals

The *Consumer health journal* (CHJ) (<http://www.consumerhealthjournal.com>) is described as “a free, monthly journal dedicated to providing in-depth health information for consumers that isn’t swayed by market or advertiser de-

mands. With articles from study result analysis (pregnancy and alcohol, milk and cancer) to lighter fare (health insurance for dogs, the geography of fat), CHJ tries to publish information that is otherwise hard to come by.”

The first issue was January 2004, and anyone can suggest or submit articles. It’s too early to judge if this democratic approach to creating a journal will be successful, but there are two problems that I will note: (1) no information about the article authors (where they work, their credentials, etc.) is provided; and (2) if you print the article, it doesn’t include the sources (they are only available as online links). I have brought these points to the attention of the CHJ Editor.

Library Journal

Collection guide May 2004

The Two Faces of Mental Illness

<http://www.libraryjournal.com/index.asp?layout=articlePrint&articleID=CA411573>

Best Consumer Health Books 2003

<http://www.libraryjournal.com/index.asp?layout=articlePrint&articleID=CA411561>

Barbara Bibel, reference librarian at the Oakland Public Library, has been preparing the CHI best books feature for several years. She provides an annotated list of a total of 24 highly recommended books in the areas of cancer, child-rearing, children’s health, diabetes, drugs, elder care, exercise, general medicine, hearing disorders, pain management, pregnancy and childbirth, psychiatry, and women’s health. Regrettably, O’Reilly’s excellent “Patient-Centered Guide” series was discontinued in 2003.

Library Trends – Special consumer health issue

<http://www.lis.uiuc.edu/puboff/catalog/trends/issues.html>
(see list of forthcoming publications)

Each issue of *Library Trends*, a quarterly journal published at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, explores a single aspect of professional librarianship, including practical applications, thorough analyses, and literature reviews. Consumer health information services merit two issues: Part 1, 53(2) Fall 2004 focuses on consumer health issues, trends, and research; Part 2, 53(3), Winter 2005 includes articles on partnerships, outreach, and the public library experience. I will be co-authoring an article with Gail

Kouame and Margo Harris tentatively titled "Consumer health information from both sides of the reference desk".

CHI readings

Burkell J. What are the chances? Evaluating risk and benefit information in consumer health materials. *J Med Libr Assoc.* 2004;92(2):200–8.

Fulda P, Kwasik H. Consumer health information provided by library and hospital websites in the South Central Region: a quantitative and qualitative analysis. *J Med Libr Assoc.* 2004;92(3). In press.

Luedecke K, Burchfield S. Planetree services partner with public libraries. *MLA News.* May 2004;16 [Consumer health column].

MedlinePlus

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/cgi/medlineplus/listserv.pl?lang=EN>

MedlinePlus, the National Library of Medicine's consumer health Web site, continues to undergo changes and add enhancements. There are now several e-mail announcement lists to which one can subscribe: (i) MedlinePlus – New is a weekly alert service for all new resources, health topics, and announcements; (ii) MedlinePlus – NIH is for new and updated consumer health information from the National Institutes of Health plus announcements and new health topics; (iii) MedlinePlus – NWS is a daily alert that includes all news headlines. It's also possible to receive customized weekly announcements with new information added on the specialty topics of children, diabetes, environmental health, mental health, seniors' health, and women's health.