

COLUMN / CHRONIQUE

Consumer health information

Compiled by Susan Murray

Medical Library Association (MLA)

The theme of the 2004 MLA Conference in Washington, D.C., is "Seize the Power!" Three of the program sessions scheduled are sponsored by the Consumer and Patient Health Information Section of MLA (CAHIS).

Power in the trenches. Sunday, May 23, 2:00–3:30 p.m.

Three consumer health librarians will share tips on fund-raising, marketing, outreach, management of volunteers, programming, and other aspects of providing consumer health information services.

The power of collaboration. Monday, May 24, 3:30–5:00 p.m.

Providing excellent service to consumers often requires collaboration with other libraries, agencies, community groups, and departments, which can help utilize limited resources more effectively. This session will cover innovative collaborative projects serving diverse populations, such as mental health consumers and Native American college students; public/academic and public/private partnerships; and successful funding strategies.

Power to the patient: new definitions of health literacy. Tuesday, May 25, 2:30–4:00 p.m.

Health literacy is much more than patients' ability to read educational pamphlets and comply with prescribed medical treatment. How are librarians assisting the public to become more health literate? Presentations include using the natural language of sexual health information to empower urban adolescent health consumers, providing information in other languages, serving consumers with chronic diseases, and assisting consumers with health insurance questions.

Consumer health publications

MLA publications

- *Introduction to reference sources in the health sciences*. 4th ed. Compiled and edited by Jo Anne Boorkman, Jeffrey Huber, and Fred Roper. 2004. 389 pages. ISBN 1555704186. MLA member price: US\$67.50 plus S/H. Nonmembers: US\$75.00 plus S/H.
- *Human-animal bond, animal therapy, and service animals*. (MLA BibKit #10). 2004. (available in print or as a PDF file).

For more information, see <http://www.mlanet.org/order/index.html>.

Majors

Two handy features are the Scientific Books Report for Medical Librarians and Brandon/Hill list updates.

Go to the libraries section at <https://www.majors.com/wws/libraries/frontpage.jsp>. Select *marketing* to access the Scientific Books Report for Medical Librarians. Select *book-lists* to access the Brandon/Hill list.

Journal of Consumer Health on the Internet

<https://www.haworthpress.com/web/JCHI/>

In addition to many useful articles on a diversity of topics, the *Journal of Consumer Health on the Internet* includes a regular Webhealth Topics feature (seasonal affective disorder in 8/1/2004), Health Sitzings (focus on one Internet resource), and several columns including Consumer Health Searcher, Alternative and Complementary Therapies, Editor's Select Sites, and Book Reviews. You can sign up to receive notice of the table of contents.

The last three issues have evaluated three major consumer health information databases: Health Reference Center – Academic (7/3/2003), Health and Wellness Center (7/4/2003), and AltHealthWatch (8/1/2004).

Health information on the Internet

Setting the public agenda for online health search: a white paper and action agenda. Washington, D.C.: URAC, December 2003 (<http://www.urac.org/documents/URAC-CWWHealthSearchWhitePaper1203.pdf>).

It is a challenge to help consumers find credible, accessible online health information. URAC, an independent, non-profit organization promoting health quality through accreditation and certification, and Consumer WebWatch, a project of the Consumers Union, undertook a project to examine factors influencing the results of health searches on the Internet. They examined a variety of studies, such as the Pew Internet & American Life Project and Eysenbach and Kohler, with interesting results:

- users generally use the same search engine for all their searches
- 51% of consumers think that it is difficult to distinguish credible from non-credible online health information

The report recommends several far-reaching activities that could be implemented by a variety of organizations for additional research, technical improvements and educational approaches.

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) resources

Homeopathy. Submitted by Mariana Lapidus. *MLA News* (Internet Resources), January 2004: 8.

Alan Rees's column spotlights CAM resources in the Fall 2003 24/1 issue of *A Majors Scientific Books Report*. Go to <https://www.majors.com/www/libraries/frontpage.jsp> and select *marketing*.

Low-Vision Resources

MedlinePlus released a new page (<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/lowvision.html>) designed for low-vision users that provides links to the interactive health tutorials and NIHSeniorHealth.gov topics formatted with larger fonts and more space between links to facilitate ease of use. Both the tutorials and NIHSeniorHealth topics give users the option to listen to the content being read aloud, and the NIHSeniorHealth topics are formatted with large fonts and other low-vision tools.

Foreign language resources

It is now easy to access health information in other languages on the Toronto Public Library's Virtual Reference Library at <http://vrl.tpl.toronto.on.ca>. For health sites in non-English languages, you can retrieve either an alphabetical list or a list arranged by language.

- Go to the *Health and Medicine* section. Click on *A–Z Subject List*, and then click on *Translation and Multilingual Sites*. This will provide an alphabetical listing of all sites in other languages.
- Go to the *Health and Medicine* section. Click on *Resources in Languages Other Than English*. This will provide a list arranged by language.

These sites are selected by librarians at the Consumer Health Information Service, and additional suggestions are welcomed. Please contact Wanda Zan at wzan@tpl.toronto.on.ca.

Frequently asked health questions (FAHQs)

Soon, a series of FAHQs will be added to the Consumer Health Information Service Web site (http://www.tpl.toronto.on.ca/uni_chi_vrl.jsp). Examples of FAHQs include

- How do I evaluate health information I find on the Internet?
- How does the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) work and which services are covered?
- How do I find a family physician and (or) specialist in my area?
- How do I find authoritative drug information?
- How do I find a support group for my medical condition?
- How do I find a nursing home or long-term care facility?
- How can I maintain a healthy lifestyle for me and my family?
- What health matters should I be concerned about before going on vacation?