

## Consumer health information

Compiled by Susan Murray

### Medical Library Association (MLA) 2008

This year's MLA meeting in May features a continuing education (CE) symposium, "Patient education and consumer health libraries: collaborating for improved patient care". A diverse panel, including consumer health information (CHI) librarian Barbara Bibel, will present compelling evidence and case studies of consumer library implementation and the role collaboration plays in improved outcome for both patient education and consumer health education for health promotion, disease management, patient safety, and scientific literacy.

#### Articles

Kennedy MG, Kiken L, Shipman JP. Addressing underutilization of consumer health information resource centers: a formative study. *J Med Libr Assoc.* 2008;96(1):42-9. Available at <http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/picrender.fcgi?artid=2212329&blobtype=pdf>.

### Notable new publications and Web sites

#### PatientsLikeMe

<http://www.patientslikeme.com/>

An online community site where patients not only share their experiences, but quantify them with hard data. This site, where patients with chronic conditions manage their disease, was profiled in *The New York Times* (Goetz T. Practicing patients. *The New York Times*. 2008 Mar 23. Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/23/magazine/23patients-t.html>).

#### MyDoctor

[www.mydoctor.ca](http://www.mydoctor.ca)

Launched by the Canadian Medical Association on April 1, mydoctor.ca is billed as the first physician-driven Canadian electronic patient health record platform. The online tools will allow doctors to track patients with chronic health conditions, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and asthma. Currently, about 200 doctors are using the portal, but it is unclear if/how doctors will bill patients, as online services are not covered by most provincial health plans.

### Collection development

*Library Journal* publishes an annual, selective round-up of notable consumer health publications:

Bibel B. Best consumer health books of 2007. *Libr J.* 2008 Feb 1. Available at <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6523448.html?q=bibel>.

They also have collection development essays that occasionally feature health topics:

Eastwood EJ. Collection Development – "Pregnancy": A healthy delivery. *Libr J.* 2008 Jan 15. Available at <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6515840.html?q=collection>.

### Books

Agnew PA. *How to talk to your doctor: getting the answers and care you need.* Sanger, Calif.: Quill Driver Books, 2008. CAN\$17.95. ISBN 1-884956-54-8.

This practical guide, written by a reporter and newspaper columnist, includes information on how to be a health advocate for someone else and an extremely useful patient's tool kit (creating a one-page medical history, prescription checklist, questions to ask about tests, a sample living will, advocate's to-do list, etc.).

Dowell J, Williams B, Snadden D. *Patient-centered prescribing: seeking concordance in practice.* Oxford: Radcliffe Publishing, 2007. (Patient-Centered Care) CAN\$51.50. ISBN 978-185775-835-1.

Authored by two physicians and a lecturer in behavioural science, this book explores the difficulties of non-compliance with medication and how a patient-centered approach can lead to a shift in patient behaviour (called concordance in the UK).

Fors G. *Why we hurt: a complete physical & spiritual guide to healing your chronic pain.* Woodbury, Mich.: Llewellyn Publications, 2007. CAN\$29.95. ISBN 978-0-7387-1065-5.

Dr. Fors, a doctor of chiropractic and holder of a diplomate in neurology, sought answers to the dilemma of chronic pain after seeing his teenaged daughter disabled

with fibromyalgia. This book prescribes a “triangle of healing” with practical physical, nutritional, and spiritual solutions. “This science-based alternative approach includes sound dietary recommendations, use of supplements, suggestions for healthy living, and proper detoxification strategies for living in a toxic world.”

Vanderhaeghe LR, Pettle A. *Sexy hormones: unlocking the secrets to vitality*. Markham, Ont.: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2007. CAN\$24.95. ISBN: 978-1-55455-015-9.

Authored by a gynecologist and a leading women’s natural health expert with a master’s in health studies in nutrition, this book teaches women “how to balance your sexy hormones, including estrogen, progesterone, testosterone, and DHEA so you feel vibrant!” Includes diet and exercise information.

White A, Pettifer M, editors. *Hazardous waist: tackling male weight problems*. Oxford: Radcliffe Publishing, 2007. CAN\$51.50. ISBN 13-978-184619-103-9.

Male weight problems are a serious public health issue and can lead to health conditions such as hypertension and diabetes. This book takes a balanced, multidisciplinary approach and offers practical, easy-to-implement tips.

## Health literacy

### New publications

The Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA) has released the following:

Rootman I, Gordon-El-Bihbety D. *A vision for a health literate Canada: report of the Expert Panel on Health Literacy*. Ottawa: CPHA, 2008. ISBN 978-1-897-485-00-2. Available at [www.cpha.ca](http://www.cpha.ca).

The Expert Panel on Health Literacy began its work in spring 2006 and learned that more than half of working age adults in Canada (55% or 11.7 million) are estimated to have inadequate health literacy skills. Research shows a strong link between low health literacy and a number of negative health outcomes, contributing to higher health service costs. This serious and costly problem will likely grow as the population ages and the incidence of chronic disease increases. The report recommends that a comprehensive, coordinated, cooperative, and integrated Pan Canadian Strategy on Health Literacy be developed.

Letter from the Editors – Health literacy and Health Promotion, A Compilation. *Ontario Health Promotion E-*

*Bulletin*. 2008 March 20. Available at <http://www.ohpe.ca/>.

Picard A. Read a book – your health depends on it. *The Globe and Mail*. 2008 March 13; L6.

New research shows that having a post-secondary education increases your life expectancy by about 7 years.

Leisey M. Viewpoints from a social work information specialist in context: thoughts for consumer health librarians. *Journal of Consumer Health on the Internet*. 2008;11(4):15–22.

This article discusses the implications of *The Healthy People 2010* definition of health literacy for the role of consumer health librarians.

### Forthcoming

Kars M, Baker LM, Wilson F, editors. *The MLA guide to health literacy at the library*. New York: Neal-Schuman, 2008. ISBN 9781555706258. US\$75.00.

This book includes my chapter, “Health literacy in Canada: highlighting library initiatives.”

### FDA site redesign

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently unveiled their redesigned Web site (<http://www.fda.gov>). The press release claimed that the new design was the result of usability tests involving “188 consumers, health care professionals, and industry representatives and other audiences.” While the new design resulted in more structured content and a pleasing appearance, it fails to address readability. The Dale-Chall and Flesch-Kincaid formulas reported an average 13th-grade reading level for materials randomly selected from the FDA site. To reach low-literate individuals, materials should be at a 5–6th grade or lower. Consider this introduction to a consumer-health page for menopause:

Working in collaboration with the National Institutes of Health and other Department of Health and Human Services agencies, FDA has developed science-based informational materials on its latest guidance on menopausal hormone therapies (estrogens and estrogens with progestins), and is working closely with women’s health organizations, community-based organizations, and other experts to get this information out to women and health-care providers.

From the *Plain Language at Work Newsletter*,  
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