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Health Librarians Highlight Best Health Info on Internet

January 29, 2009 · By [Editor](#)



PHOENIX - So you have a seemingly random set of symptoms and are ready to call the doctor but you reach for the mouse first, right? Access to health information through the Internet has expanded exponentially, allowing all of us to “play doctor” from the comfort - or discomfort as the case may be - of sitting with our laptop.

But how do you navigate the myriad sites that can describe the differences between everyday aches and pains and serious conditions? Well, don’t just punch up WebMD or Google “arthritis,” say two experts on the subject.

Librarians from The University of Arizona and Arizona State University refer to an acknowledged list of the top 10 consumer health Web sites, according to criteria set by the Medical Library Association.

Among the best are <http://www.medlineplus.gov/> and <http://www.healthfinder.gov/>, two federally run sites, and <http://www.familydoctor.org/>, by the American Academy of Family Physicians, according to Jacqueline Donaldson Doyle, MS, AHIP, head of the Health Sciences Library at The University of Arizona College of Medicine - Phoenix in partnership with Arizona State University, and Kathleen Carlson, MLS, AHIP, health sciences librarian at ASU’s Downtown Phoenix campus.

“We strongly believe that patients need to be activists,” said Doyle. “They need to be involved in their health care, and the more informed they are, the better patients they can be.”

The criteria, according to <http://www.mlanet.org/>, for selecting top sites for consumers includes being authoritative, having attribution, being current, disclosing its financial backing and checking the advertising policy. HON or Health on the Net website (<http://www.hon.ch/>) helps you find the most reliable information and uses that checklist in giving its stamp of approval.

“If you are looking at any Web site,” Carlson said, “Do they meet these criteria? Do they have a financial disclosure? What is the advertising policy? Not just for health, it should be for anything you look at, even when you buy something from an online vendor.”

Carlson has gone so far as to create a Web page to help consumers evaluate health Web sites at <http://lib.asu.edu/tutorials>.

Doyle and Carlson also noted two of the best places to start for information in Arizona are “AZ Health Info” at <http://www.azhealthinfo.org/> and “Arizona Go Local” at <http://www.azgolocal.com/>.

The two librarians took part in the most recent edition of “Get Smart,” a monthly breakfast series held by the two universities at the historic Tom’s Tavern in downtown Phoenix on the third Wednesday of each month.

Doyle, who has a master’s degree in library science from Cal-State Fullerton, has worked in a variety of libraries, including public, academic, public health

and hospital libraries, and is past president of the Medical Library Association. Carlson is a veteran of the news media, having earned her degree in mass communications from the University of Minnesota. She has worked for ABC, NBC and CNN, as well as Asia TV in New York before embarking on her second career, spending 11 years as a hospital librarian. She has earned two Emmy awards for her work.

The librarians say the varied hospitals in the Phoenix area all have outstanding libraries and corresponding sites and should always be consulted.

Following are the top 10 consumer health Web sites, as compiled by Doyle and Carlson. The list is in alphabetical order, not ranked.

1. <http://www.cancer.gov/>
2. <http://www.cdc.gov/>
3. <http://www.familydoctor.org/>
4. www.healthfinder.gov
5. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/>
6. <http://www.medlineplus.gov/>
7. <http://www.noah-health.org/>
8. hivinsite.ucsf.edu
9. <http://www.kidshealth.org/>
10. <http://www.medem.com/>

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