How to find credible health information online

Your physician says you have a health concern or you’ve been diagnosed with a medical condition. You go home to think about the news, and you find you have many questions. Of course, asking your doctor these questions is always going to be the best course of action. But if you want to head to the Internet to do a little of your own research, beware that this media space is filled with charities and misinformation. It’s almost as if some web posters think: “I have a computer. That means I can be a doctor.”

In short, not all health websites are created equal. Some absolutely offer more objective, credible health information than others.

Local hospitals
Rather than typing your condition into a general topic web browser, start your online search at the websites of your local hospitals. Many have posted online health encyclopedias and thrive on the websites for several of them below. The content is often authored and edited by trained medical personnel and is written in layman’s terms, and you can search easily for specific information on your condition.

University of Pennsylvania Health System: www.uphs.upenn.edu/health-system/patient-resources/health-information.html

Thomas Jefferson University Hospital:
http://healthpartners.jefferson.edu/encyclopedia

Cooper University Hospital:
http://cooperhealth.org/health-information

Drexel University College of Medicine:
www.drexmed.edu/home/healthencyclopedia.aspx

Abington Memorial Hospital:
www.amh.org/healthresources

General websites
In addition to these hospital websites, you can find helpful and credible health information in the following:

National Institutes of Health: http://www.nih.gov


Look for the HON seal
Health on the Net (HON) Foundation is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that certifies that those who use health information on the Internet have adhered to a set code of ethics and professionalism. The HONcode guidelines website managers is setting up a minimum set of mechanisms to provide quality, objective and transparent medical information tailored to the needs of the online audience. For your peace of mind, look for the HONcode symbol at the bottom of a health website page.

The HONcode is the most widely accepted reference for online health and medical publishers. Currently, the HONcode is used by more than 7,900 certified websites, more than 10 million pages, covering 102 countries. While HON cannot guarantee the accuracy with absolute assurance of the medical information presented by a website and its completeness at any given time, possession of the HONcode seal allows a site to demonstrate its intention to contribute to quality medical information by publishing objective and transparent information. For more on HON, visit www.hon.ch.