

## **Evaluating Health Information on the Web**

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### **What We Learned About:**

Health information finding tools.

Using search engine tools to find web-based consumer health information sources.

Identifying a website's "clues to quality": Sponsorship, Currency, Factual Information, and Audience.

Using these clues to gather information about and evaluate an online health information source.

### **Evaluating Health Information Sources**

- The internet provides immediate access to health information, but it's not always easy to distinguish the "good" from the "bad."
- When hunting for internet treasure, look for clues to determine if the information is as credible, timely, and useful as it appears to be.
  - These clues tell us about the site's:
    - 🔍 Sponsorship
    - 🔍 Currency
    - 🔍 Factual Information
    - 🔍 Audience (& Privacy)
- Sponsorship
  - Can you easily identify the sponsoring organization?
  - Who runs the site, why have they created it, and what do they want from you?
  - Can you contact them?
  - Where does the money to support the site come from?
    - The web address can provide information about the site's nature: .gov, .edu, .org, .com
    - Commercial sites can be sources of "good" information- if there is disclosure and if you can tell the advertisements from the content
- Currency
  - Is the site regularly available?

- Is the date of last revision posted?
  - Health information changes frequently.
  - Websites should reflect the most up-to-date information on diseases and treatments, research, and patient care.
- Factual Information
  - Does the information on the site favor its sponsor?
  - Where does the information come from?
  - Is the information reviewed by experts? How is it selected?
  - Does the site make unbelievable claims?
    - Information should be clearly presented, factual (not opinion), and able to be verified (in the professional literature or links to other, reliable web pages).
    - If the information is stated as an opinion, that should be clearly stated. The source of the opinion should be identified (as a professional, and organization, etc.).
- Audience (& Privacy)
  - For whom was the site designed? To whom is it offered?
    - The site should clearly state its intended audience: professional, consumer, etc..
    - Many health-related sites have designated areas for health care providers and consumers. The site design should make this distinction clear.
    - Privacy: Do “they” want your personal information? What do “they” plan to do with it?

### **Tips, Tricks, and Additional Help**

- Use Search Engine Tools
  - Directories
  - Advanced Search Features
- Use Health Info Finding Tools
  - Organizations
  - Clearinghouses.
  - Selective lists of quality health information sites.
- Ask.
  - Your healthcare provider.
  - At your library.

### Online Resources for Health Consumers

Consumer Health Resources (UA College of Community Health Sciences)

<http://cchs.ua.edu/library/consumer-health-resources>

A "selective list of health information web sites, chosen for their currency, authority, full-text availability, and relevancy to consumer health issues."

Deciphering Medspeak (Medical Library Association)

[www.mlanet.org/resources/medspeak/topten.html](http://www.mlanet.org/resources/medspeak/topten.html)

Includes the "Top Ten Most Useful Consumer Health Websites" referenced in the presentation.

Evaluating Health Information (MedlinePlus)

[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/evaluatinghealthinformation.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/evaluatinghealthinformation.html)

Tips and additional resources from U.S. National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Evaluating Internet Health Information (National Library of Medicine)

[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/webeval/webeval.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/webeval/webeval.html)

16-minute, Flash-based tutorial.

Google Directory Health Category

[www.google.com/Top/Health/](http://www.google.com/Top/Health/)

Referenced in the presentation, the Google Directory offers access to "the web organized by topic into categories."

Health in the Yahoo! Directory

<http://dir.yahoo.com/Health/>

Referenced in the presentation.

healthfinder.gov (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services)

[www.healthfinder.gov/](http://www.healthfinder.gov/)

Referenced in the presentation. From the site: "[A] government Web site where you will find information and tools to help you and those you care about stay healthy."

MedlinePlus

<http://medlineplus.gov/>

One of the clearinghouses referenced in the presentation. From the site: "MedlinePlus brings together authoritative information from... government agencies and health-related organizations."

Resources for Health Consumers (Medical Library Association)

[www.mlanet.org/resources/consumr\\_index.html](http://www.mlanet.org/resources/consumr_index.html)

Includes: MLA Resources, Find a Medical Library, Hospital Quality Resources, National Consumer Health Resources, Special Resources for Older Adults.

The Engaged E-patient Population (Pew Internet & American Life Project)

[www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2008/The-Engaged-Epatient-Population.aspx](http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2008/The-Engaged-Epatient-Population.aspx)

Referenced in the presentation.

Top 100 Health Websites You Can Trust (CAPHIS)

<http://caphis.mlanet.org/consumer/index.html>

Referenced in the presentation, this list is offered by the Consumer and Patient Health Information Section of the Medical Library Association.

This list includes the websites referenced in the presentation, along with some others.

Direct links to these resources are available at Melissa Fortson's health\_eval Bookmarks Page on Delicious ([http://delicious.com/mbfortson/health\\_eval](http://delicious.com/mbfortson/health_eval)).

Delicious is a service that allows users to save and share any web page on the internet. You do not have to be signed in to the Delicious service to access the page linked above or the websites listed below.

Health and information professionals may also wish to explore the resources available via Melissa Fortson's health\_eval\_LIS Bookmarks Page on Delicious ([http://delicious.com/mbfortson/health\\_eval](http://delicious.com/mbfortson/health_eval)).