

*Danbury Hospital Patient Education Sheet***Evaluating Health Information on the Internet**

The Internet has made it easier and faster to find health information. A lot of this information is good and valuable. However the Internet also allows people to spread information that is false, out of date, misleading and sometimes just plain wrong. It can be very easy for someone to create a website. There is no monitoring or fact checking of sites on the Internet. So how can you tell if a health website is giving you reliable information? There are several ways to check:

- Ownership
- Quality
- Quackery
- Evidence
- Currency
- Bias
- Privacy

**Ownership**

A good website will have a page that should make it clear who the owner is. Look for an “about us” page. This will tell you in more detail about who runs the website: a branch of the Federal Government, a non-profit organization, a hospital, a private company or an individual. There is a big difference between a site that says, “I created this

website after my heart attack” and one that says, “This page about heart attack was created by the American Heart Association”. Websites should always have a way to contact the owner of the site. If there is no contact information and you cannot easily find out who runs the site, use caution.

Quality

All websites are not created equal. Check the site to see how the information is chosen and approved. It is usually in the “about us” page and may be called “editorial policy” or “review policy”. The people who make the policy should also be included, along with their titles. They may be called an “advisory board” or an “editorial board.” The site may also talk about “our writers” or “authors” instead. Check to see if they are in the medical field. If they are not then they cannot be medical experts.

Quackery

Does the site make claims that are too good to be true? Does it promise quick, dramatic, instant results, a miracle cure based on secret ingredients? Beware of such sites! Get a second opinion by checking more sites.

Evidence

Rely on medical research and not opinion. Always look for the author of the information; this could be an individual or an organization. Good examples are “Written by Jane Smith R.N” or “Copyright 2003. American Heart Association” and not “Jane from Connecticut” or “Interested Individuals.” If there are case histories or testimonials, look for contact information such as a telephone number or an email

address. If there are none, treat the site with caution.

Currency

Check the dates on documents. A document on the latest treatment for diabetes should be current, but a document on coping with the loss of a loved one doesn't need to be. If there are links on the website, try them. If they are broken the site may not be kept up-to-date. An up-to-date site will have "revised" or "modified" alongside a date in the current year usually at the bottom of the page. This will tell you when the site was last updated

Bias

Ask yourself what is the purpose of this site?
What is its goal? For whom was it written?
View it like you would an infomercial on TV.

Is the site giving sound information, or promoting a product, such as - does it refer to just one type of drug or treatment? If so then maybe the drug company might be providing the information. Check other sites to learn more about that same drug.

Privacy

If you are asked to provide personal information or fill out a registration form, read the site's privacy policy to make sure your information is being protected. There should be a link on the website saying "Privacy Policy." If the policy says your information is being shared, then it is not protected.

Top Five most useful health websites from the Medical Library Association

Cancer.gov

www.cancer.gov

Mayo Clinic

www.mayoclinic.com

MedlinePlus

www.medlineplus.gov

KidsHealth

www.kidshealth.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov

Sources:

MedlinePlus www.medlineplus.gov

National Cancer Institute www.cancer.gov

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For more information, or to learn about the specialized services and programs available at Danbury Hospital, please visit www.DanburyHospital.org