

## **Judge: Web Sites for Health. Consumer Guidelines**

**To help health consumers make informed choices about Web sites.  
Based on the views of health consumers and support groups.**

### **Summary of "How to search the Internet for health information"**

These guidelines aim to help health consumers make informed decisions about Web sites. This leaflet summarises advice on how to search the Internet for health information.

#### **• Information searching**

Time spent searching is not wasted. It helps you develop your critical skills and identify sites you can trust. It helps many people adjust to their condition.

Support groups are important sources of help, e.g. they provide emotional and personal support; they provide information; they advise about information; they act as a link between the patient or carer and the professional; they fight the patient or carer's corner.

Professionals can also provide information, e.g. staff at your public library; your local Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) in hospitals; health care staff.

#### **• Gateways - searchable catalogues to good quality health Web sites**

Try a health gateway first. Here are some examples of health gateways.

- NHS Choices (<http://www.nhs.uk/>)
- NHS Direct (<http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk>)
- Contact a Family (<http://www.cafamily.org.uk>)
- Patient UK (<http://www.patient.co.uk>)
- Intute: Medicine including dentistry (<http://www.intute.ac.uk/healthandlifesciences/medicine/>)
- NHS Evidence Health Information Resources (<http://www.library.nhs.uk/>)
- MEDLINEplus (<http://medlineplus.gov>)
- MEDLINE (<http://www.pubmed.gov>)

#### **• Search engines**

Use search engines if you cannot find what you want from the gateways. Here are some examples of search engines.

- Google (<http://www.google.co.uk>)
- AllTheWeb (<http://www.alltheweb.com>)
- Yahoo (<http://www.yahoo.com>)
- MedHunt (<http://www.hon.ch/>)

- **Search tips.**

Unless your search is very simple, always use the 'advanced search' option provided by the search engine. This allows you to do things like:

- Find results with all of the words you type in your query. This makes it much more likely to find relevant sites and to cut down on the number of results;
- Find results with the exact phrase, by putting the words in quote marks "...". This is very useful when looking for names of diseases, organisations, people;
- Choose the language, for example, English.

The Help pages will give you details about how to use the search engine and how to search more efficiently. When using other search tools like gateways and directories, look at their Help pages too.

- **Confidence building - learning how to search**

Look for taster sessions or short courses at local organisations like public libraries, the WEA (Workers' Educational Association), further education colleges or universities.

Public libraries provide free access to the Internet.

Here are examples of some sites that provide free online tutorials for developing Internet skills.

- The Online Netskills Interactive Course - TONIC (<http://www.netskills.ac.uk/onlinecourses/tonic/>)
- Intute Virtual Training Suite (<http://www.vts.intute.ac.uk/>)

### **Source of these guidelines**

Author: Sue Childs, Research Fellow, School of Computing, Engineering and Information Sciences, Northumbria University.

These guidelines were produced by Contact a Family, Northumbria University and the Centre for Health Information Quality, through a project supported by the Health Foundation. Published February 2003. Last updated December 2009. Review date December 2010.