

The Three Tasks of Information Seeking

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1. Find Accurate Information

We are told that this is the "Information Age" and, indeed, information is more widely available today than it has been in the past. So is misinformation. Distinguishing between the two is not easy. When looking for information, it is wise to go to reputable sources, including your doctors, medical journals, and disease-specific national societies (such as the American Cancer Society). They and other reliable sources can be accessed in a variety of ways, including:

Libraries

Local, college, and hospital libraries are generally good resources for information. Many college libraries are open to the public and have internet access to full articles in nursing and medical journals. Librarians are there to assist visitors in finding these articles. When only abstracts of the articles are available (descriptions of what is in the article, but not the article itself) patients may need to get copies of those articles directly from the journals. Some of these may be found at local hospital libraries. If not, the articles may be available through your local library's participation in a regional interlibrary loan system.

Internet web sites

An abundance of health information can be found on the internet, but patients should be especially cautious here. Unless sure about the reliability and accuracy of a particular web site, it may be wise to seek out the numerous sites hosted by academic institutions, governments, medical associations, disease-specific national societies and other known organizations, some of which are: www.healthfinder.gov, www.mayohealth.org, www.aarp.org/healthguide, www.clinicaltrials.gov, www.fda.gov, www.cancer.org, and www.americanheart.org

Books

Books are a valuable resource for information on medications. Two books listed below are available through bookstores or directly from the publisher. Expect to pay shipping costs when ordering from the publisher.

The PDR Pocket Guide to Prescription Drugs. Published by Pocket Books, a division of Simon & Shuster, NY, NY. 1-888-866-6631 List price \$6.69

Worst Pills Best Pills. Published by Public Citizen (founded by Ralph Nader), Wash. DC. 1-202-588-1000 List Price \$11.50

2. Find Out What the Information Means

Much of the information patients may access will use medical terminology that is difficult for the layperson to understand. Medical dictionaries and encyclopedias are available to help readers interpret articles. Webster, Taber and Mosby publish medical encyclopedias and/or dictionaries which bookstores often carry in their health section, or can order if there are none in stock. Medical dictionaries may also be found on the internet at: www.healthfinder.gov and other health web sites. Of course, physicians may be helpful here as well.

3. Find Out if the Information is Relevant to You

If you succeed in getting and understanding medical information but do not share and discuss that information with your doctor to see if it relates to you, you may be doing yourself a disservice. If you agree that doctors should treat patients, not diseases, because diseases affect different patients differently, then logic would suggest that seemingly relevant information in an article, may not be relevant to you at all. YOU NEED TO TALK WITH YOUR DOCTOR and, together, explore whether it relates to you.

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