

Information Resource:

Hospital Libraries and Loansome Doc®

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If you are seeking medical information, hospital libraries can be valuable resources. Because patients are increasingly encouraged to participate in decision-making, and because the healthcare system is expected to support this effort, many hospitals have now opened their libraries to the general public. Each hospital library operates differently, however, so it's best to call them to find out when they are open to the public, the specific services they provide, and what charges, if any, apply.

Some hospital libraries are open all day, every day. Others are not – often because they have a part-time librarian. Some hospital libraries have information geared for the lay public. Most do not. Generally, the information found in hospital libraries is written strictly for the healthcare professional. Understanding this kind of information will require more work on your part, but it is not impossible. In fact, hospital librarians can be very helpful. For instance, after talking with you, they may be able to help you clarify what it is you are looking for, and help you pinpoint appropriate sources of information. Also, assuming it is available, they may be able to direct you to information that is somewhat less technical and therefore more understandable. Also, according to one hospital librarian, Mary Evans, an important advantage of hospital libraries is that their librarians "...have experience in using the medical literature and helping people navigate and track things down."

Loansome Doc®

In addition to the books and journals they have on hand, some hospital libraries may be able to help members of the general public gain access to information that they do not have on hand. An example of this is the Loansome Doc service available through the National Library of Medicine (NLM) and participating medical libraries. For instance, let's say you log on to the NLM's website at <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/> and search their PubMed® or NLM Gateway databases. (Using the NLM Gateway, allows you to search in a lot of different databases at once.) Then, let's say you find a listing for an article that is just what you want, but the full text is not available. What can you do? Well, if you have registered for the Loansome Doc service, you can order the article online. The order will then be forwarded to the participating medical library that you designated when you registered (your local hospital library, for instance). The library will then get the article for you. While the NLM will not charge you for ordering articles through them, many hospital libraries will charge a fee for each article they get for you. This is generally to cover their costs of getting the article. Check with your local hospital library to find out what they charge.

To Register for Loansome Doc

Information about registering is available from the NLM website. Remember, if you don't have a computer with Internet access, your local public library probably does. To find Loansome Doc information from the NLM website, click on "LIBRARY SERVICES" and then on "Obtaining Articles." If you decide to register for Loansome Doc, you should first speak with the library you want to deal with to see if they provide this service to the general public. If they do, you will need to get their Docline IDs so that you can designate them as the libraries you want to deal with. You may provide IDs for up to four participating libraries. To register for Loansome Doc, go first to the PubMed page and click "Order Documents" or to the NLM Gateway page and click on "Ordering Info." Instructions may also be found on their website.

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