

# HEALTHNET NEWS

A newsletter for public librarians and others interested in consumer health information services

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## UPDATE

### MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Healthnet is offering another session of its popular workshop "**Healthy Web Sites: how to find quality health information on the Internet**". The program will be held on Tuesday, October 31, 2006 at the Willimantic Library Service Center from 9:00 a.m. – Noon.



This workshop will help you find answers to health related questions you may receive from your library users such as "What are the side effects of this new medication I'm taking?" "What is actually done in a surgical procedure my doctor has recommended?" " My son was recently diagnosed with a rare medical condition. Where can I find information about it?" The program will be presented by Alberta L. Richetelle and Judith Kronick, from Healthnet: Connecticut Consumer Health Information Network at the University of Connecticut Health Center in Farmington.

Program topics will include locating information about the qualifications of health care providers, where to find information on diseases and medical conditions and their treatment, locating information on medications, and how to evaluate Internet web sites to make sure you are getting accurate and current information.

To register for this workshop, send an email to <mailto:richetelle@nso.uhc.edu> and include your name, the name of the workshop, the name of your library, your telephone number at your library, and any accommodations you may need because of a disability. A registration confirmation will be sent to you via email.

## NETNEWS

### MEDICARE REVEALS PAYMENT DETAILS

How much does Medicare pay hospitals and healthcare providers for laparoscopic gall bladder removal, back fusion surgery, knee replacement operations, heart defibrillator insertion, and other frequent elective procedures? Until June, health consumers did not have access to this important information that is potentially very helpful in making medical decisions. Beginning in June, the United States Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services began publishing data on its website at [http://www.cms.hhs.gov/HealthCareConInit/01\\_Overview.asp - TopOfPage](http://www.cms.hhs.gov/HealthCareConInit/01_Overview.asp - TopOfPage) about payments made to health care providers in fiscal year 2005, ending September 30, for thirty common elective surgeries.

Medicare payments refer to payments on behalf of adults 65 and over, individuals under 65 with specific disabilities, and individuals of any age with End-Stage Renal Disease who are enrolled in the Medicare federal health insurance program. The data does not include payments made for these procedures by private insurers or uninsured individuals.

The payment chart is arranged by county within each state. The data state the number of cases of each surgery conducted at individual hospitals within the county as well as the range of payments by county. The volume of procedures performed at hospitals is a statistic many health consumers seek out in order to determine whether a hospital is experienced in performing a specific surgery. A national average price and national average payment for the procedure are included. There is no data on payments made to individual hospitals.

The Medicare program is also planning to post information online during 2006 about payments for elective procedures at ambulatory surgery centers, and hospital outpatient and physician-provided services.



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## LONG TERM CARE COSTS IN CONNECTICUT

If you are planning nursing home care for a family member, how can you compare costs of nursing homes in your town? The Connecticut Partnership for Long-Term Care, a state of Connecticut alliance with private insurance companies, publishes an annual online report that specifies nursing home costs and other health care service costs in Connecticut.

The online report, at <http://www.opm.state.ct.us/pdpd4/ltc/consumer/CostofCare.htm>, lists in chart form, by type of facility and then by town, “average private pay rates for nursing facilities, home health agencies, and home and community based services.” The chart includes the average charge per visit or per hour for registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, speech therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and home health aides, as well as daily nursing home fees. It provides average charges for adult day care services, homemaker services, and live-in companions. It is also a source of comparison for rates charged by specific Connecticut home health care agencies.

The Partnership-affiliated companies provide specially priced long-term care insurance plans that do not require individuals to exhaust all their assets. The Partnership website at <http://www.opm.state.ct.us/pdpd4/ltc/home.htm> includes online brochures for health consumers about purchasing long-term health insurance, differences between Partnership insurance policies and other long-term care insurance policies, as well as government program payments and tax benefits.

## HOW SAFE ARE YOUR SUPPLEMENTS?



Since herbal supplements are not tested or regulated by the U. S. Food and Drug Administration, the quality of individual products is difficult to determine. ConsumerLab.com, a privately held company, evaluates certain health and nutrition products and publishes the test results online at <http://www.consumerlab.com/>. The tests determine whether the product includes the ingredients that are stated on its label and, in some product evaluations, if it is contaminated. ConsumerLab.com evaluates products such as vitamins and minerals, herbal and dietary supplements, and sports and energy products. Among the products tested are probiotics, creatine, calcium, multivitamins, ginseng, and glucosamine.

Advertisements are posted on the website. A sampling of abbreviated test reports and recalls and warnings about products are available online to all. A more extensive array of complete product reviews and a Natural Products Encyclopedia are available only to subscribers.

## PREPARING FOR CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL STAYS

Children who will be treated overnight at the hospital are invited for a reassuring, welcoming visit in advance at the Children's Hospital of Boston and at many other hospitals throughout the country. The Children's Hospital of Boston provides an additional orientation source. “Arthur's Guide to Children's Hospital Boston,” a feature found on the hospital website at <http://www.childrenshospital.org/arthur/> highlights the popular aardvark Arthur from children's books by Marc Brown and from the PBS television series *Arthur*.

The online visit is available in English and in Spanish. It is presented in the format of a colorful, child-friendly school report by Arthur and his animal friends who have paid a visit to the Children's Hospital. Directed to younger children, the website explains a doctor's visit, a preoperative visit to the hospital, and an overnight hospitalization. It includes “waiting games” and a packing list. There are introductions to “People to Meet” on the hospital staff such as nurses, doctors, speech therapists, child life specialists, and housekeeping staff. The Parent Page has a list of recommended books for children and parents preparing for a hospital stay.

The text includes reassuring statements such as, “Don't worry... you didn't do anything wrong! The hospital 'detective work' is only to help the doctors figure out how to make you feel better.” One cartoon caption concludes, “The more you know about the hospital, the less scary it is.”

Another source of child-friendly hospitalization information is the “People, Places, and Things That Help Me” section of the KidsHealth website at [http://kidshealth.org/kid/feel\\_better/index.html](http://kidshealth.org/kid/feel_better/index.html). There are explanations for children about “Going to the Hospital,” “What Happens in the Emergency Room?” and “What Happens in the Operating Room?”

## FATS...WHAT'S GOOD AND WHAT'S BAD

Trying to remember which fats you should eat and which fats you shouldn't eat? How much saturated fat is found in different types of margarine? Which fats are monounsaturated? What Harvard researchers discovered about increasing cholesterol in the diet? What additional fat content information new food labels reveal? The Harvard School of Public Health provides a clearly written, basic overview of this important nutrition topic at <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/fats.html>. Information about carbohydrates, protein, fiber, food pyramids, vitamins, healthy weight, and related nutrition topics is also available on the Harvard Nutritionsource website at <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/index.html>.



## FINDING HEALTH CARE RESOURCES IN CONNECTICUT

Obtaining health care when you have no health insurance, purchasing low cost eyeglasses, locating HIV testing centers, borrowing or renting medical equipment at low cost, finding assistance with prescription drug costs...all of these are important challenges for many Connecticut residents. Infoline, Connecticut's round-the-clock community information referral service, offers an online Health Care Resource Guide at <http://www.infoline.org/healthcare/default.asp> that provides locations, descriptions, and websites of many Connecticut organizations and agencies that can help meet these needs.

The Guide also offers information on obtaining health insurance through state, federal, and private programs, Connecticut social service benefit offices, medical air transportation, child advocacy organizations, lead poisoning prevention programs, Medicaid appeals, and related health care topics. InfoLine is available by phoning **211**.

*Programs that Help People in Connecticut*, published online by the Connecticut Association for Human Services at <http://www.cahs.org/publications/index.htm> in English and in Spanish, is also a very helpful source of health and social service information.

Healthnet's online resource guide, *Navigating the Health Care System*, at <http://library.uchc.edu/departm/hnet/hcbib.html> provides links to both Connecticut and national health care resources.



## FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

The following books are recommended for public libraries and health sciences libraries with consumer health collections. They are not part of the UCHC library collection.

**Caring for Kids. The Complete Guide to Children's Health.** Norman Saunders and Jeremy Friedman, editors. Firefly Books, 2006. 448 p. (ISBN 1-55407-160-9) \$35.00.

"When should I worry about my child's nosebleed? How should I manage nightmares? Which children are at greatest risk for meningitis? When should I worry about my child's acute abdominal pain?" Parents confront concerns like these on a daily (or nightly) basis. Two Canadian pediatricians and their colleagues provide brief, straightforward, informative explanations and recommendations for these situations and many other physical and emotional medical challenges that parents of infants and children face. For each of the more than 250 medical conditions described, they provide an explanation, a physical description, and treatment information. The authors discuss common childhood symptoms, problems of the newborn, childhood infections, developmental and school difficulties, sleep problems, circulatory disorders, accidents and emergencies, and many additional medical disorders.

Editors Norman Saunders, associate professor of pediatrics at the University of Toronto, Canada and pediatrician at the Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto, Canada and Jeremy Friedman, Chief of Pediatric Medicine at the Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto, Canada and associate professor of pediatrics at the University of Toronto, Canada, have provided a valuable overview for parents. The book is enhanced by photographs, diagrams, line drawings, and a glossary.

**Gordito Doesn't Mean Healthy. What Every Latina Mother Needs to Know to Raise Fit, Happy, Healthy Kids.**

Claudia Gonzalez and Lourdes Alcaniz. Berkley Books, 2006. 295 p. (ISBN 0-425-20770-6 English language version, ISBN 0-425-20771-4 Spanish language version ) \$13.00.

According to author and dietician Claudia Gonzalez, Latino parents consider a chubby child a healthy one. This cultural concept may have originated when food was scarce and excess fat provided an increased chance of survival. Consequently, Latino parents are often not concerned when their children are labeled overweight at a pediatrician's visit.

An experienced pediatric dietitian and Latino affairs spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association, Ms. Gonzalez is concerned about the high rate of obesity and type 2 diabetes among Latino children. As Latinos in the United States adopt more unhealthy American eating habits, these risks increase. In her book, Ms. Gonzalez describes the health risks of obesity, healthy fats, appropriate serving portions, the importance of specific food groups, the benefits of certain aspects of a Latino diet, and eating disorders. Specific nutritional advice is presented by age groups.

Available in both English and Spanish versions, this book focuses on providing nutrition advice tailored to the dietary habits and cultural food-related customs of Latino families. Suggested menu plans include popular Latino foods such as papaya, yucca, black beans, and tortillas. The Latino Food Pyramid is included. There is a resource guide to government agencies and organizations that provide information about nutrition, diabetes, eating disorders, and physical activity. The book concludes with three "stories of success" about families who improved their children's nutritional habits and health.

**Harvard Medical School Guide to Healthy Eating During Pregnancy.** W. Allan Walker with Courtney Humphries. McGraw-Hill, 2006. 211 p. (ISBN 0-07-144332-0) \$16.95.



Dr. W. Allan Walker believes that a woman's efforts to ensure her child's health should begin very early... before pregnancy. A woman anticipating pregnancy may improve her future child's long term health by eating a nutritionally sound diet and by maintaining a healthy weight. This attention to careful nutrition should continue throughout her pregnancy. According to current research, the health of the fetus affects the individual in adulthood as well as childhood.

A professor of pediatrics and director of the Division of Nutrition at Harvard Medical School, Dr. Walker bases his recommendations for helping expectant mothers ensure good "fetal nutrition" on the nutrition policies of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

The specifics of beginning this healthy start for a child are described in chapters about healthy weight gain and exercise, pregnancy body changes and fetal growth, dietary supplements, breastfeeding, and healthy food choices with recipes. He discusses recommended daily amounts of nutrients and substances such as caffeine, alcohol, tobacco, artificial sweeteners, and medications to avoid or use cautiously. Because dietary supplements are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration, Dr. Walker urges pregnant women to use great caution in deciding on their use.

**A Parent's Guide to Childhood Obesity.** Sandra Hassink, editor-in-chief. American Academy of Pediatrics, 2006. 256 p. (ISBN 1-58110-198-8) \$15.95.

To help parents whose children are among the 17.1 per cent of U.S. children who are overweight, the American Academy of Pediatrics, national professional association of pediatricians, provides practical recommendations for improving children's diets and encouraging children to participate in more physical activity. In this helpful Guide, there is also advice about dealing with the emotional and social consequences of childhood obesity, such as its social stigma and possible low self-esteem. There are discussions about the role that parental style, family interactions, and emotions play in family eating habits as well as suggestions for helping an overweight child cope with teasing, holiday food temptations, and unhealthy snacking.

The book explains how to introduce dietary changes gradually, incorporate nutritious snacks daily, encourage support from other adults in the child's life, make modifications to the family environment, and make time for more frequent family physical activity. There are sample menus and suggestions for age groups from infancy to adolescence. The book is enhanced by worksheets "to take to your pediatrician" that include questions about the home environment and the child's current eating habits and activity levels, organized by age group.

**Raising an Emotionally Healthy Child When a Parent is Sick.** Paula K. Rauch and Anna C. Muriel. Mc-Graw-Hill, 2006. 448 p. (ISBN 07-144681-8) \$14.95.

For a caring mother or father who is seriously ill, the role of raising a child presents unique parenting challenges. The authors of this compassionate book are Harvard Medical School child psychiatrists at the Massachusetts General Hospital Cancer Center parenting program with considerable experience guiding parents in this very difficult circumstance. Drs. Rauch and Muriel present their advice from the perspective of the emotional needs of the child rather than the needs of the ill parent. They discuss how children of varying ages understand illness, how to assemble a parental support system, communicating effectively with a child, maintaining a family routine, planning hospital visits, discussing death, ways that children cope, finances and legal concerns, and leaving a legacy for a child.

**What to Eat. An Aisle-by-Aisle Guide to Savvy Food Choices and Good Eating.** Marion Nestle. North Point Press, 2006. 611 p. (ISBN 0-86547-704-3) \$30.00.



It's not surprising that grocery shopping can sometimes seem like an overwhelming experience. The colorful, plentiful displays, the numerous aisles, complicated food labels, and the massive size of many grocery stores can make a careful, measured decision on the nutritional value of the foods you are purchasing a very difficult mission.

In her lengthy but very consumer-friendly book, **What to Eat. An Aisle-by-Aisle Guide to Savvy Food Choices and Good Eating**, Marion Nestle, nutrition professor at New York University, and author of **Food Politics** (2002) and **Safe Food** (2003), acknowledges the difficulties that shoppers face when confronted by a multitude of choices—30,000 to 40,000 products in many supermarkets. She admits that the prodigious research she did for this book by careful examination of grocery store products and labels, speaking with experts in the food industry, and extensive reading was challenging for her as a nutrition professor. She sympathizes with consumers trying to base healthy food purchases for themselves and their families on solid information. This challenge is complicated by the marketing efforts of the food industry because the reality is that “the foods that sell best and bring in the most profit are not necessarily the ones that are best for your health.”

In order to illustrate her “basic principles” of healthy eating (“eat less, move more, eat lots of fruit and vegetables”) and the challenges of following them, she takes readers on a behind-the-scenes trip through the aisles of the average American supermarket to reveal its pitfalls and marketing strategies. She discusses food labels, portion sizes, organic foods, food safety, processed foods, bottled water, supplements and health food, irradiation, methylmercury in fish, food industry health claims, prepared foods, and soy foods. She conveys extensive background information on the food industry, food processing, and the transportation of foods across the country.

The book concludes with an extensive, detailed, chapter-by-chapter section of notes and references.

**When the Focus is on Care. Palliative Care and Cancer.** Kathleen M. Foley, et. al. editor. American Cancer Society, 2005. 337 p. (ISBN 0-944235-53-0 paperback) \$19.95.

Cancer treatment information is of great importance to patients and families. For some patients, unfortunately, information about end-of-life care options becomes a very significant need. Palliative care, often provided to patients at end of life as well as throughout their illness, focuses on maintaining a patient's quality of life to the extent possible, and managing pain in an environment respectful of the patient's beliefs and culture. Often including hospice care, palliative care “focuses on the physical, psychosocial, and spiritual needs” of the patient and family and encompasses care of the “whole person, including the body, mind, and spirit.”

This comprehensive, compassionate guide was written by physicians and supportive care staff from cancer care hospitals around the country, under the sponsorship of the American Cancer Society.

While the book is directed to patients with advanced cancer, it also includes a section especially for caregivers and family members. There is information about making informed treatment decisions, communicating with health care providers, and the emotional aspects of the dying process. There are recommendations for coping with advanced illness and enriching the last stage of life. In addition to an overview of phases of cancer illness, treatment options, responses to treatment, and care settings for patients with advanced cancer, the book provides guidance for managing practical concerns that accompany advanced cancer: insurance, financial, work, and legal decisions. It includes a glossary and a guide to cancer, palliative care, and caregiver resources.

**YOU: The Smart Patient. An Insider's Handbook for Getting the Best Treatment.** Michael F. Roizen and Mehmet C. Oz. Free Press, 2006. 412 p. (ISBN 0-7432-9301-3) \$14.95.

You may have seen their light-hearted, consumer-friendly appearances on the *Oprah* television show, so their casual, humorous style of writing may not surprise you. But Doctors Roizen and Oz have really emphasized humor in this book, even including silly cartoons, while providing readers with a substantive guide to obtaining quality medical care. Dr. Roizen, an internist and anesthesiologist at the Cleveland Clinic, and Dr. Oz, a professor and vice-chairman of surgery at New York Presbyterian-Columbia University, with the participation of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO), a hospital accrediting organization, focus on guiding readers in careful selection of physicians, hospitals, and insurance companies.

In this easy-to-read guide, they encourage patients to be active, assertive partners with their doctors and they provide a number of specific, practical recommendations for playing this role. They emphasize that the patient is the person ultimately “most responsible for success of... [the] health care team.”

They note that the “smart patient” has evolved over the past ten years as more patients are researching their medical conditions on the Internet and arriving at their doctors’ appointments bearing printouts of information they have found online.

The authors include chapters on surgery, prescription medications, managing your hospital stay, alternative medicine, and health insurance. They explain what type of information a physician is seeking during a medical interview, the importance of tracing your family health history (and describe how to interview your aunts and uncles), what questions to ask the office staff about a doctor you are considering, when a second opinion is important, how to evaluate a hospital before you need one, and your rights as a patient. The text includes “inside tips” such as the best time of day to call an insurance company’s medical director, a diplomatic way of questioning a nurse about physician recommendations, how to make friends with the nursing staff when you are a hospital patient, and ways to help avoid infections when you are hospitalized.

The appendix includes a brief medical glossary (“Medical Jargon Explained”), sample forms for charting your health history and recording important phone numbers, a living will form, and resources for locating a board-certified physician, medical licensing boards, and state boards of pharmacies.

The authors advise readers that Internet access is crucial and they recommend that if they don’t have a computer at home, they should use one for free at their public library.



*Healthnet News is written by Alberta L. Richetelle and Judith Kronick.  
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