

HEALTHNET NEWS

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

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UPDATE

NEW ONLINE COURSE FOR SMART PATIENTS

A free, online course to help health consumers navigate the increasingly complicated health care system effectively is now offered through the website of the University of Connecticut Health Center at <http://healthcademy.uchc.edu/>

A new concept in consumer health education, the HealthEcademy website currently presents five video presentations by University of Connecticut Health Center School of Medicine faculty and other Health Center professionals related to their areas of expertise.

Available online at any time, the Internet-based classes encourage viewers to become more proactive patient advocates for themselves and for their families.

The presentations discuss patient rights and responsibilities, privacy protection under HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act), end-of-life treatment decision-making, preparing for productive doctor visits, interpreting diagnostic and screening test results, understanding the process of diagnosis, and locating and evaluating reliable sources of health information. Each class is approximately 30 or 60 minutes long.

Viewers may select presentations on "Questions You Were Never AskedBut Should Have Been" [at your doctor's office], "Understanding the Results of Diagnostic or Screening Tests," "Legal and Ethical Issues at the End of Life," "Understanding HIPAA Privacy," and "A Roadmap to Reliable Health Information."

The online class "A Roadmap to Reliable Health Information" discusses effective searching for health information, reliable health websites for consumers and librarians, and health website evaluation. During the presentation, there are demonstrations of health information searches on recommended websites.

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S HEALTH STUDY BEGINS

How do air quality, diet, neighborhood playgrounds, and genetic background affect children's risks for asthma, obesity, and autism in the United States? The National Children's Study, a nationwide research plan authorized by the federal Children's Health Act of 2000, will focus on the effects of environment, both "natural and man-made," and its interaction with genetics, in order to better understand childhood development and the "root causes of many childhood and adult diseases."



The results of research exploring these questions may not be forthcoming for quite a while. The subjects of the nationwide study have not yet been born. Researchers have just begun recruiting pregnant women, and women who might become pregnant, in the neighborhoods of designated study centers. One hundred thousand women will be enrolled and recruitment will continue for four years. The children will be studied until age twenty-one.

Recruitment will begin in two diverse areas: rural Duplin County in North Carolina and densely populated, multilingual Queens, New York. There will eventually be one hundred five study locations throughout the country. In Connecticut, Yale University will recruit women volunteers in Litchfield and New Haven counties.



Healthnet: Connecticut Consumer Health Information Network
Lyman Maynard Stowe Library ♦ University of Connecticut Health Center
PO Box 4003 ♦ Farmington CT 06034-4003
Telephone: 860/679-4055 ♦ email : richetelle@nso.uchc.edu
<http://library.uchc.edu/departm/hnet>

The research will be conducted by a consortium of federal government agencies under the direction of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, part of the National Institutes of Health.

Background information is online at <http://www.nationalchildrensstudy.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

NETNEWS

HELP FOR TROOPS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Whether in the process of deploying for war overseas or adjusting to a return home from battle, troops and their families face many challenges. A number of resources may provide information and guidance to troops, their spouses, and children.

Medlineplus, the National Library of Medicine's comprehensive consumer health website, links to websites focused on Veterans and Military Health at <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/veteransandmilitaryhealth.html>. The links connect to information on Rehabilitation/Recovery, Coping, Financial Issues, and Women's Health and other related topics.

Concern for Children and Parents

After the War Zone. A Practical Guide for Returning Troops and Their Families., written by professors at Dartmouth Medical School who are directors of the Department of Veterans' Affairs National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, is described on pages 4-5 of this newsletter.

The Kidshealth website at <http://kidshealth.org/index.html>, a source of "practical" health and emotion-related information with separate areas tailored to the needs of parents, teens, and children, offers brief articles on topics such as "How Do I Help My Kids Deal with my Husband's Deployment?" "How Do I Handle the Transition When My Husband Returns from War?" and "Worrying About War—for Kids."

As part of its Talk, Listen, Connect website focused on "Deployments, Homecomings, Changes," the Sesame Workshop website at <http://archive.sesameworkshop.org/tlc/> provides both Spanish and English resources. These include videos featuring Sesame Street characters, with versions for children and for parents, about the experiences of deployments, homecoming, and the changes that may realistically be expected. An online Magazine for Parents and Caregivers includes many practical recommendations for preparing children for these experiences.

Mental Health America (formerly the National Mental Health Association) addresses the needs of troops and families in the Operation Healthy Reunions section of its website at <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/reunions/>. This section includes articles with recommendations for "How to Get Back to "Normal," "Being a Couple Again," "Reconnecting with Your Children" and associated subjects. There are also links to an extensive number of government and organization resources for troops, veterans, and families.

War veterans or a family member or friend of a veteran may experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, characterized by symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares, difficulty sleeping, and outbursts of anger.

The National Institute of Mental Health, a part of the National Institutes of Health, recently published an updated version of its online booklet, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) at <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/summary.shtml>. This booklet discusses the symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment of PTSD and briefly answers questions such as "Where Can I Go for Help?" and "How Can I Help a Friend or Relative Who Has PTSD?"

The American Psychiatric Association, national professional association of psychiatrists, offers a fact sheet about Posttraumatic Stress Disorder at <http://www.healthyminds.org/factsheets/LTF-PTSD.pdf> among its collection of online "Let's Talk Facts" brochures at <http://www.healthyminds.org/letstalkfacts.cfm#pos>

PAYING FOR HEALTH CARE



After you've helped a grateful library user find information about the most effective health care for a specific disease, the question may still remain in the back of her mind.... how will I manage to pay for this recommended treatment?

Financial assistance for medical care is a pressing concern for many American families. Some have neglected to obtain a test or treatment recommended by their doctor because of its cost. A recent Kaiser Family Foundation poll at http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/h08_posr102108pkg.cfm reported that one out of three American families had difficulty paying medical bills within the last year.

The National Library of Medicine's Medlineplus consumer health website offers links to a variety of resources for financial assistance for health care at <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/financialassistance.html> Additional resources are described on the Medlineplus Health Insurance webpage at <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/healthinsurance.html>

Three Resource Guides on the Healthnet website at <http://library.uchc.edu/departm/hnet/> *Navigating the Health Care System, Caregiving, and Patient Advocacy*, link to sources of financial assistance under topics such as "Obtaining Health Insurance," "Managed Care Plans," "Understanding Medicare," and "Financial Assistance."

Programs that help people in Connecticut. Benefits Available/Who is Eligible/Where to Go, a booklet published annually by Northeast Utilities and the Connecticut Association for Human Services in both Spanish and English, includes information on financial assistance for health care, provided by federal, state, and local agencies. Both versions are available online at <http://www.caahs.org/publications/index.htm>

The Connecticut Network of Care for Behavioral Health website, a state government and private agency collaboration, suggests sources of assistance for families without health insurance at <http://connecticut.networkofcare.org/mh/insurance/lowcost.cfm>

Connecticut's Health Care Resource Guide, published online by the Infoline/211 information referral system, at <http://www.211ct.org/healthcare/default.asp> provides details on contacting agencies and organizations that assist with state, federal, and private health insurance programs. The Guide includes information on assistance for individuals with disabilities, elders, prescription drug payment, AIDS treatment, vision and hearing aids, and obtaining medical equipment. "Health Care/Financial Assistance for Medical Expenses" is a category in the 211 Connecticut Community Resources Database at <http://www.211ct.org/referweb/>

Connecticut resident may call Infoline with specific questions about Connecticut resources by dialing **211** at anytime of the day or night.

The National Eye Institute, a component of the National Institutes of Health, publishes recommendations for "Financial Aid for Eye Care" at <http://www.nei.nih.gov/health/financialaid.asp>

COMPARING CONNECTICUT NURSING HOMES

Selecting a nursing home for a family member is a difficult and challenging undertaking...especially at a time of family stress. How can you determine which nursing home in your area offers the best care, provides the highest nursing staff to patient ratio, helps maintain patient independence when possible, and works to prevent and treat pressure sores?

To assist families with this demanding process, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services recently added a *FiveStar Quality Rating System* of the nearly 16,000 nursing homes in the U.S. to its website at <http://www.medicare.gov/NHCompare/> . The nursing homes included provide “skilled care” to patients and are eligible to receive Medicare and/or Medicaid reimbursement from the federal government.

The Rating System website is searchable by name of the nursing home or location (city, county, state, or zip code). Ratings range from “Much Above Average” (five stars) to “Much Below Average” (one star).

The System measures nursing homes on the basis of “health inspection results, quality measures, and staffing levels,” as well as providing an overall rating for each nursing home. The health inspection results are determined by trained state nursing home inspectors who pay onsite visits to each of the nursing homes. Their reports are checked by federal inspectors. Because of variations in the inspection process between states, the most effective comparisons are those made among nursing homes within the same state. Staffing levels are self-reported by nursing homes annually.

Up to three nursing homes from the search results may be selected for comparison. Search results include date of the last inspection, number of “health deficiencies” for each nursing home, and average number of “health deficiencies” in Connecticut and in the U.S.

Among the quality measures are the percentage of residents who have been given immunizations for pneumonia and influenza, percentage of residents who have pressure sores and “moderate to severe pain,” and have been “physically restrained.”

The website emphasizes the importance of visiting each nursing home being considered in addition to examining its star ratings. A four page Nursing Home Checklist at www.medicare.gov/nursing/checklist.pdf may be downloaded from the website and completed by the family after each visit. The checklist describes the nursing home’s staffing, facilities, activities, level of safety, and quality of food.



FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

The following titles are recommended to public libraries and other libraries providing consumer health information services. They are not part of the UConn Health Center Library collection.

After the War Zone. A Practical Guide for Returning Troops and Their Families. Laurie B. Slone and Matthew J. Friedman. Da Capo, 2008. 279 p. (ISBN 978-1-60094-054-5 paperback), \$14.95.

The emotional consequences of serving in the armed forces during wartime can be daunting. The authors, professors at Dartmouth Medical School acknowledge that “service member[s] in a war zone...are forever changed by [their] experience.”

Both authors have a great deal of professional involvement with troops and veterans. Dr. Friedman, a psychiatrist, is Executive Director of the U.S. Department of Veterans’ Affairs National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. Dr. Slone is Associate Director for Research and Education at the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.

This comprehensive, practical handbook discusses recovery from Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, barriers to seeking care for the physical and emotional consequences of war, realities of the homecoming experience, and the process of reestablishing day-to-day relationships with partners and children. Illustrative stories of the challenging experiences troops and families face upon their return enrich the text.

The book's goal is to help returning troops recognize the commonality of their challenging, "reintegration" experience and to provide guidance in facing these challenges.

Healthy Child Healthy World. Creating a Cleaner, Greener, Safer Home. Christopher Gavigan. Dutton, 2008. 321 p. (ISBN 1-4165-6051-3 paperback \$15.00).



"No one can do everything. Everyone can do something."

That is the reassuring theme of this guide for concerned parents, motivated to adapt their lifestyles to provide a healthier environment for their children. It is intended to provide reassurance to parents who are often overwhelmed by concerns about the effects of environmental hazards on their children and by widely publicized cautions against the use of many household products.

An informative handbook, written in a relaxing style, it is published under the auspices of the nonprofit, environmental organization, Healthy Child Healthy World, and authored by its executive director. In addition to background information and recommendations, it incorporates commentaries by committed activists and celebrities, many relating their own parenting steps toward "going green."

The recommendations begin with healthy nutrition during pregnancy. They include practical advice for parents on selecting a "green" pediatrician, safely cleaning the house as your children grow, and preparing their own cleaning products. There are even recipes for homemade baby food and made-from-scratch fingerpaint.

Chapters discuss natural beauty care, safer toys, reducing garden pesticide exposure and making yards greener, organic food, pet care, environmentally sound house cleaning and home improvement. Additional resources appear on the Healthy Child Healthy World organization's website at <http://healthychild.org/>

Knee Surgery. The Essential Guide to Total Knee Recovery. Daniel Fulham O'Neill. St. Martin's Griffin, 2008. 206 p. (ISBN 0-312-36293-5 paperback), \$14.95.

Dr. O'Neill, an experienced orthopedic surgeon, explains that not all enduring knee pain warrants surgery. Non-surgical treatments, including over-the-counter medications, may suffice.

However, in support of the hundreds of thousands of patients who undergo total knee replacement and anterior cruciate ligament reconstruction as well as the numerous patients who experience arthroscopic knee surgery for tears of the cartilage, osteoarthritis, and other disorders, Dr. O'Neill provides guidance for "both [the] physical and mental rehabilitation" necessary after knee surgery. According to Dr. O'Neill, both are essential for patient recovery. He emphasizes the importance of patient participation in the recovery process and provides specific recommendations for range-of-motion exercises, "movement patterns," and aerobic training. He provides exercises (along with illustrative photographs) for strengthening and preparing the knee before surgery is performed.

A practical guide, this book includes specifics on nutritious foods to have on hand, supplies needed in the medicine cabinet, and realistic expectations for recovery and family assistance...before the day of surgery. To assist patients after knee surgery, there are instructions on using crutches, advice on caring for the incision, a sample schedule for a day following surgery, specifics on safe resumption of sports, and finally, additional "exercises for life after surgery." A resource guide and glossary enhance the book.

Living with Coronary Heart Disease. Jerome E. Granato. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. 206 p. (ISBN 0-8018-9024-1 hardcover \$45.00, ISBN 0-8018-9025-X paperback \$16.95).

When James' persistent indigestion, unrelenting chest discomfort, and his family's coaxing led him to visit his doctor, he was "shocked to learn that he had coronary heart disease." A hypothetical patient, James may be typical of many middle-aged adults who consider themselves to be in good health and suddenly find themselves facing diagnostic testing, lifelong medications, and the prospect of angioplasty or coronary bypass surgery. Coronary heart disease was the cause of more than half of deaths from cardiovascular disease in 2004.

An experienced cardiologist, Dr. Jerome Granato uses James as an example of a patient facing the process of "thickening of the arterial walls[s]" throughout the body that confront individuals with coronary heart disease and can lead to chest pain, fatigue, shortness of breath, and a heart attack. He describes the diagnostic testing process James experiences, risk factors that might lead to his diagnosis, and the many questions James has for his physician.

Since his physician determines that James must undergo coronary bypass surgery, the author explains the surgical procedure, its possible risks and complications, as well as the rehabilitation process.

Technical terms such as "intravascular inflammatory response," "endothelium," "coronary thrombus," and "reperfusion therapy" are explained in the text. An excellent overview of the disease, its diagnosis and treatment, the text requires careful reading. It is greatly enhanced by color diagrams (and accompanying explanatory text) showing a normal and narrowed coronary arteries, rupture of atherosclerotic plaque within an artery, balloon angioplasty, and stent placement.



*Healthnet News is written by Judith Kronick and Alberta L. Richetelle
If you have questions about anything in the newsletter or about Healthnet services for Connecticut public libraries,
please call 860/679-4055; e-mail address :richetelle@nso.uchc.edu*

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