

# HEALTHNET NEWS

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

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## NETNEWS

### *“MAKING SENSE OF SCIENCE STORIES”*

*“I don’t know what to believe!”*

Have you read conflicting stories about the same research study? Are you confused about which reporter’s version you can rely on?

How can you determine if a news article is based on someone’s opinion or on scientific research?

How do science editors determine which research reports to publish in a medical research journal? What is the “peer review” process and how does it affect which research articles are published?



.....Many non-scientists are eager to understand recent medical research that may directly affect their health.

*A newly published guide to science research...*

**“I Don’t Know What to Believe! Making Sense of Science Stories”** is written especially “for people who follow debates about science and medicine in the news” and who frequently despair, “I don’t know what to believe!”

It describes how scientists and editors decide which research reports are worthy of publication. This is a challenging task...more than “1.8 million scientific research articles are published each year.”

The online booklet also suggests questions for you, as a non-scientist, to ask about “scientific and medical information” you are presented with.

The guide is clearly written, especially for health consumers who are eager to learn how to find accurate research studies, but lack a technical scientific background.

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It was published by **Sense About Science**, a British-based nonprofit organization “that helps people make sense of science and evidence.”

The guide explains how science editors judge the validity of research articles before they decide if they are worthy of publication...and why it is important that medical research be published and not remain hidden in a researcher’s lab notes.

Among the organization’s programs is the “**For the Record**” feature of its website which recruits scientists to respond in careful, logical terms to news reports that “misrepresent... scientific evidence.” Does “excessive television watching turn children into monsters” as one British newspaper reported? Is “BPA linked with increased risk of miscarriage?” You can find an accurate conclusion, written by scientists, on the “**For the Record**” section of the website.

*Other science research guides....*

The **Health News Review** website provides "independent expert reviews" of health news in the media. It asks questions such as “Is that news story balanced? Is it accurate?” and provides tips to help you analyze health news. The website offers specific **review criteria** for judging health news stories presented by the media.

The **Health News Review** website includes **Tips for Understanding Studies** (What does NNT (number needed to treat) mean? What is the difference between “absolute” and “relative” risk? Can you rely on news from scientific research meetings?) and a **Toolkit** of tips for understanding research studies.

The **Health News Watchdog blog** is written by Gary Schweitzer, the founder of **Health News Review**. Mr. Schweitzer is a medical journalist with more than 40 years of experience.

Healthnet’s Subject Guide: **Medical Research: What You Need To Know**, for health consumers, links to resources for “Understanding the Research Process,” evaluating news sources, “Finding Medical Research Reports,” and understanding the “Language of Medicine.”

**Behind the Headlines** is a colorful, up-to-date British website that evaluates current news reports of medical research studies.

#### *WILL MY HEALTH INSURANCE COMPANY COVER IT?*

#### *A TOOLKIT TO HELP YOU PAY FOR MENTAL HEALTH CARE*

*“What consumers need to know about seeking approval for behavioral health services”*

Two new federal laws require your insurance company to cover mental health and substance abuse treatment.



“The **Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act** requires insurance groups that offer coverage for mental health or substance use disorders to provide the same level of benefits that they do for general medical treatment.”

The federal government’s Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration also states that beginning in 2014, the “Affordable Care Act (ACA) ...will require all small group and individual market plans created before March 23, 2010 to comply with federal [mental health] parity requirements. Qualified Health Plans offered through the Health Insurance Marketplaces in every state must include coverage for mental health and substance use disorders as one of the ten categories of Essential Health Benefits. “

Although your health insurance plan covers mental health and substance abuse care, making sure that your insurance company pays for your care may not be easy or straightforward.

Since patients and families seeking mental health care coverage may be in the midst of a crisis situation, having help in obtaining coverage is especially important.

What questions do you need to ask your doctor and your insurance company to help guide you in assuring that the insurance company pays for your mental health care?

What do insurance terms such “balance billing,” “cost shares,” and “pre-authorization” mean and how do these concepts affect your insurance coverage?

*To help patients and families...*

The Connecticut Insurance Department has published a straightforward, nine-page, illustrated, step-by-step online Toolkit to help you in obtaining payment for mental health and substance abuse care.

The **Consumer Toolkit for Navigating Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse Care Through Your Health Insurance Plan** is designed to help you ask the right questions of your doctor and your insurance company.

The Toolkit helps to indicate exactly what pre-planning is necessary, *before* your doctor provides care.

It includes a glossary with explanations of important insurance terms.

It is necessary to understand that “pre-authorization” means that, to be sure your insurance company will pay for your care, you may need to obtain prior approval from your insurance company before receiving treatment from your doctor. And if your doctor is “out-of-network,” and has no contract with your insurance company, you will pay more for treatment by that doctor. An “allowed amount” is a maximum amount that indicates how much your insurance company will consider paying for your care.

The Toolkit reminds you to contact your insurance company beforehand to determine which physicians and health care providers are “in-network” and covered by insurance... to learn if your hospital, as well as your doctor, are part of the insurance company’s network...to find out if your health care provider will handle the pre-authorization process with the insurance company on your behalf... to determine if your insurance company will pay out-of-network providers and what part of that cost will be charged to you....

The Toolkit urges patients to “Make Informed Decisions” by gathering important information before making decisions on care you will receive, to do “Research First” to determine if your doctor is an in-network health care provider, to “Know Your Insurance Plan” and its requirements in advance, to “Seek ‘Medical Necessity’ Approval” from your doctor, and to determine your “Out-of-Pocket Costs.”

What if your insurance company refuses to pay for services? The Toolkit guides you in appealing denials from your company.

To be sure you have gathered all the necessary details you will need in sorting out these conversations and appeals with your insurance company, the Toolkit includes a “Behavioral Health & Substance Abuse Care Checklist of Information” for patients and families to complete in preparation for these negotiations. These details include treatment information, benefit and provider information, type of health services needed, clinical information about the patient and his care, and an authorization form for allowing release of information to the insurance company.

The State of Connecticut Insurance Department’s consumer affairs unit (860-297-3900) is an additional source of assistance.

## HELP FOR BRAIN INJURY SURVIVORS AND THEIR FAMILIES

### *Questions about brain injury?*

Interested in rehabilitation programs and specialists? Looking for legal resources? Need guidance in returning to work after a brain injury? Want information about Brain Injury Alliance of Connecticut support groups for survivors of brain injury and their families?

The **Brain Injury Alliance of Connecticut**, an organization focused on brain injury prevention and recovery, is ready to help brain injury survivors and their families with answers to specific questions about brain injury resources.

Call the free Brain Injury Alliance of Connecticut HelpLine **1-800-278-8242** to ask questions of brain injury specialists. You may also email your brain injury-related questions to [general@biact.org](mailto:general@biact.org).

The Brain Injury Alliance of Connecticut's website offers links to **Community Resources** in Connecticut. These resources relate to energy assistance, mental health, insurance help, work-related assistance, and social services.

## A SPANISH HEALTH WEBSITE FOR PARENTS

More than 300 children's health topics are available in Spanish on the **HealthyChildren.org en Espanol** website.



The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), national professional association of pediatricians, has provided guidance to parents on its **HealthyChildren.org** website in English.

Now the features of this medical website for parents are available in Spanish as well via the new **HealthyChildren.org en Espanol** website.

The new website includes, under the "Tips and Tools" ("Consejos & Herramientas") tab, an Ask the Pediatrician question- and-answer feature, a Symptom Checker, a Find a Pediatrician search page, and a Hot Topics page.

The Symptom Checker allows parents to determine, on the basis of the seriousness of symptoms typed, whether or not the children's condition is urgent and whether he needs to be seen by a doctor immediately.



## FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

The following titles are recommended to public libraries and other libraries providing consumer health information services.

**Health Care Handbook. A Clear and Concise Guide to the United States Health Care System.** Elisabeth Askin and Nathan Moore. St. Louis, Washington University in St. Louis, 2012. 239 p. (ISBN 978-0-615-65093-7).

While U. S. medical students are immersed in learning the details of human anatomy, physiology, and clinical care, they may not be aware of the intricacies of the health care system in which they will train and practice. It is a complicated and changing system, influenced by insurance payments, and administrative flow charts, as well as hospital financial challenges.

Two Washington University in St. Louis medical students became aware of this gap in their knowledge, were unable to find a book that provided a brief, readable, thorough introduction, and set out to write a comprehensive, understandable guide to the U.S. healthcare system...while still in medical school!

Their concise, valuable handbook fills a knowledge gap for health consumers as well as medical students.

The **Health Care Handbook** approaches its subject from the viewpoint of someone who may lack a fundamental understanding of the complexities of the U.S. healthcare system and needs an overview that encompasses the reality of the practice of health care in the United States.

It provides great depth as well as a basic overview...describing credentialing of health care providers, government regulation of pharmaceutical products and medical devices, types of health insurance coverage and organizations, medical malpractice and its effects on costs and medical practice, measurements of health care quality, types of health care systems, government insurance programs, such as Medicare and Medicaid, hospital administrative structures and chains-of-command.

The book includes a clearly written explanation of the Affordable Care Act. This section responds to questions such as, "What exactly is an Exchange?" "What will happen with Medicare?" "What will happen with Medicaid and CHIP (State Children's Insurance Program)?"

Well-organized and succinctly written, the book is enriched by colorful, clear graphics, charts, and graphs. It intersperses sometimes humorous, real-life analogies to illustrate the complex structure of the health care system. (Why not buy that hurricane-prone beach house?...my insurance will replace it. Or, I'll continue to smoke or visit the tanning salon because insurance will pay for the health consequences...)

Each chapter concludes with a glossary, list of suggested readings, and an extensive list of references. The book is available in paperback and e-book formats.

*Another resource....*

In addition, Healthnet's online Subject Guide [Navigating the Health Care System](#) provides links to information about the Affordable Care Act, obtaining health insurance, hospital care information, understanding the Medicare system, evaluating hospitals and other healthcare topics.

**Merck Manual Go-To Home Guide for Symptoms.** Robert S. Porter and Justin L. Kaplan, editors. Merck Sharp & Dohme Corporation, 2013. 509 p. (ISBN 978-0-911910-98-8).

Do you have a fever? Have you suddenly lost hearing in one ear? Is your neck painful? Has your mouth been dry for a long time? Are you experiencing muscle cramps?

What could be causing your symptoms?

To help guide patients experiencing medical symptoms, the **Merck Manual Go-To Home Guide for Symptoms** arranges more than one hundred symptoms including eye pain, joint pain, numbness, snoring, blurred vision, chest pain, insomnia, dizziness, tremor, nausea, and weight loss, alphabetically.

Each symptom is described by a contributing physician who specializes in that area of medicine. Many are common symptoms. Some, however, may indicate “serious, life-threatening illnesses.”

Symptoms may be accessed through the Table of Contents or the Index.

The Guide is based on the physician-oriented **Merck Manual of Patient Symptoms**.

Each brief chapter about a specific symptom describes Causes, Evaluation, Treatment, and Key Points in succinct, clear language. Both common and less common causes are described. The Evaluation section for each symptom includes warning signs, recommendations on when to see a doctor, “what the doctor does,” and the type of testing conducted for that symptom.

A glossary of medical term prefixes, roots, and suffixes precedes the symptom chapters. Medical terms are also defined, using plain language, within the text.

The book concludes with a section about common medical tests. A chart about blood tests includes the reference range for many common blood tests. A chart for diagnostic procedures states the “body area or sample tested” and gives a very brief description of the test.

*Other resources....*

An alphabetical **list of symptoms** , with links to a collection of websites about each symptom, appears on the **MedlinePlus website** from the National Library of Medicine. These range from fatigue, headache, abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting, to indigestion.

The **FamilyDoctor.org** website, published by the American Academy of Family Physicians, includes “**symptom checker flowcharts**” organized by general topic, e.g. mouth problems, headaches, hearing problems, abdominal pain, long-term. The user’s answer to specific questions, such as “Has your cough begun recently?” directs the user to the next question. Depending on the outcome of the responses, the user is directed to self-care measures (e.g. “Get plenty of rest, and drink lots of fluids. Try over-the-counter medicines to treat your symptoms.”) or, in serious situations, to “GO TO THE NEAREST EMERGENCY ROOM RIGHT AWAY.”

The **MayoClinic.com** website for health consumers offers a **Symptom Checker** feature that asks the website user to check boxes describing the symptom, what triggers or worsens it, what relieves it, and what additional symptoms accompany it. The website responds with a list of links to possible causes, with the most likely cause first.

**Depression and Your Child. A Guide for Parents and Caregivers.** Deborah Serani. Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2013. 221 p. (ISBN 978-1-4422-2145-1).

This is a valuable book.

It is valuable because it provides comprehensive, practical assistance to parents whose children are experiencing depression. Parents, whose child is in this situation, are likely very worried and anxious about their child. This situation may present a crisis within the family.

This is a unique book.

The author's personal experiences are essential to the impact of this book. The author experienced ongoing, severe depression during childhood and adolescence, extending to her early years of college. This medical condition had a serious negative influence on her childhood and adolescence.

Although "no two people have the same life story" (p. 12), her experience greatly enriches this compassionate and beneficial book.

Dr. Serani, now a psychologist and professor, remembers vividly her personal experience as a depressed child and college student. **Depression and Your Child. A Guide for Parents and Caregivers**, is enriched by her generous retelling of her personal experiences and her remembrance of her isolating behavior and the painful feelings that motivated that behavior.

She also includes a number of her patients' anonymous case histories to illustrate the experiences of children experiencing severe depression and the effect of specific treatments on their recovery.

For many centuries, it was believed that children could not experience depression. Even today, family members, teachers, and friends may not accept the reality of a child's condition and distress. Parents may not feel comfortable sharing their child's condition, even with people close to them. The author states clearly that childhood depression is prevalent and a "real illness that is clinically recognized and widely treated." (p. 19)

This book discusses causes, symptoms, family management, and therapies for childhood depression. The book explores these topics with enough depth to make the information beneficial to families in their day-to-day experiences.

The book explains that depression in children may manifest itself in ways different from its sad, withdrawn manner in many adults. It affects children in physical as well as emotional ways. It can occur at any age...even in babies.

The book's recommendations are realistic and detailed. They include a Suicide Prevention Plan, ways parents can support psychotherapy and medication treatments, help in planning for a child's future, holistic approaches to enhance treatment, a clear picture of hospitalization, and suggestions to help parents maintain their own emotional balance.

For each chapter, the book's Notes include numerous references to medical journal articles and texts cited within the narrative. There is also a glossary, and a bibliography of helpful books and resources as well as a checklist form that parents can use to keep track of physical and emotional side effects their children may be experiencing from psychiatric medications. The **Guide** also includes an extensive list of "High-Profile People with Mood Disorders," to reassure families that their situation is not unique.

**Your Child's Teeth: A Complete Guide for Parents.** Evelina Weidman Sterling and Angie Best-Boss. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. 284 p. (ISBN 978-1-4214-1062-3 hardcover, ISBN 978-1-4214-1063-0 paperback).



Even before all of a child's baby teeth have erupted, parents have many questions about their child's dental health.

Are sealants safe for children? When should my child first visit a dentist? How should I find a dentist for my child? Why are my son's permanent teeth crooked even though his baby teeth were straight and even? How can I encourage my daughter to brush her teeth as often as she should? What foods are likely to cause cavities?

This practical, helpful guide for parents asks many dental questions that may be of concern to parents and provides clear explanations for each of them.

It may seem to many parents that their child's dental health affects only their smile and the appearance of their teeth.

But, according to this plainly written, comprehensive guide, dental health has wider implications.

Poor oral health can lead to difficulty chewing food and avoidance of healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables.. tooth and gum infections that may result in diabetes and heart disease as children age.. impaired speech, and interruptions to learning, when painful dental conditions cause school absences.

Authors Evelina Weidman Sterling, a health educator and health writer, and Angie Best-Boss, a nurse and health writer, consulted pediatric dentists for guidance about children's dental health.

The book includes clear diagrams that illustrate tooth anatomy, children's tooth growth, and the tooth numbers by which dentists identify individual teeth.

The authors emphasize the importance of keeping baby teeth healthy although they are temporary. They explain that infection in primary teeth can invade new, adult teeth. Missing baby teeth can impact the placement of new teeth as they emerge and grow.

The book explains how to determine if your child's teeth are *really* clean, effective tooth brushing techniques when you help your child brush, proper care of toothbrushes, selection of a toothpaste, and the significance of fluoride for children.

It includes a recipe for homemade toothpaste and answers practical questions such as "Are there gluten-free toothpastes?" "Is it harmful to swallow toothpaste?" "Should my child use mouthwash?" What does oral surgery for children entail?

There is advice for planning for a child's first dental visit, including preparing a health history for your child and the family, and explaining the visit to the child in a reassuring, matter-of-fact way. There are details about tools and types of x-rays used for children.

The Guide explains normal teeth growth and dental care from infancy to young adulthood. It describes oral health problems in children such as tooth decay, enamel erosion, gum disease, common tongue conditions, orthodontic care, and tooth discoloration.

**Your Child's Teeth: A Complete Guide for Parents** is a valuable overview for parents of children of all ages.



*Other resources.....*

The National Library of Medicine's [MedlinePlus website](#) links to a variety of authoritative information sources on "[Child Dental Health.](#)"

[Your Dental Health: A Guide for Patients and Families](#) , on the Healthnet website, includes a section about [Children's Dental Health.](#)

**Military Mental Health Care. A Guide for Service Members, Veterans, Families, and Community.** Cheryl Lawnhorne-Scott and Don Philpott. Rowman & Littlefield, 2013. 228 p. (ISBN 978-1-4422-2093-5).

The mental health struggles of soldiers and veterans affect their family, friends, and community as well as themselves.



Military men and women may be affected by depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, anxiety, sexual trauma, grief, and other mental health conditions while serving in the armed forces and long after their return and discharge.

The stigma of acknowledging mental health conditions, and the military culture that encourages soldiers to remain strong and uncomplaining, hinders many soldiers and veterans from seeking help with stressful mental health challenges.

However, military training in resiliency can be extended beyond physical training to include the importance of seeking help and support from family and mental health professionals in order to achieve and maintain mental health. This **Guide for Service Members, Veterans, Families, and Community** encourages resilience among servicemen and women coping with mental health challenges.

This comprehensive book describes each relevant mental health condition and its cause, identifies soldiers at high risk for the condition, describes the extent of the problem in the military, its symptoms, therapies, recovery process, positive (and negative) ways to cope with the condition, and explains how family and friends can help. These explanations provide specifics (how to improve sleep habits, contact information for support helplines, ways to resume normal routines, descriptions of individual medications).

The book emphasizes the importance of the soldier's family in facing mental health problems and providing support to the soldier. However, reuniting with one's family after deployment may be very difficult. Families members may feel distant from each other after a long separation and may need to become reacquainted. Family roles may have changed, by necessity, during deployment. Military service members may discover it takes a great deal of time to resume a place in his/her family.

*Other resources...(contd).*

**Mental Health.gov**, a website of the U.S. Health and Human Services Department, includes a section with help especially “**for Service Members, Veterans and Their Families**” who “may face different mental health issues than the general public.”

On the **Zero To Three** website, designed for caregivers of young children, an area includes “**Veteran Families Resources**.” This area focuses on the needs of babies and toddlers in a military family.

The **MedlinePlus website**, created by the National Library of Medicine, offers a health topic page about **Veterans and Military Mental Health**. The topics range from depression and traumatic brain injury in soldiers and veterans, to building family resilience, “Counseling Options for Service Members and Their Families,” and preparing children for the return of a parent from military service.

The UCONN Health Center Library’s **Mental Health subject guide** includes information on children’s mental health.

“**When a Parent Goes to War**” is an online article for parents that offers recommendations to help their children cope before deployment of a parent, during deployment, and after a parent’s return from military service.



*Healthnet News is written by Judith Kronick and Alberta Richetelle  
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