Pearls

12 best Web sites for clinical needs

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Nearly 1 in 4 Internet users has searched the Web for mental health information,[1] but finding reliable sources is challenging. Wading through poorly organized, variable quality sites to find information you need can be time-consuming and frustrating.[2] Also, without your guidance, patients may consult disreputable Web sites and follow advice that is contrary to standard psychiatric care.[3]

Because less is more when using the Internet, we recommend 1 good Web site for each of the following clinical needs. Each may be useful to you and to recommend to your patients.

Patient education

Medlineplus.gov from the National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is an authoritative source for reliable, unbiased information on medications and illnesses. You will find valuable information on all psychotropic and nonpsychotropic medications and most common psychiatric disorders, including information in Spanish.

You can print out medication information and give it to patients, though we recommend asking patients to visit the Web site to introduce them to this resource. Most important, Medlineplus.gov provides links to other trusted medical Web pages. For consumers, this site provides a variety of information including an illustrated medical encyclopedia and a guide to finding reputable health information on the Web. Medlineplus.gov is an enormous site that alone could satisfy most of your patient education needs.

Formulary information

When prescribing, you often need to know if a patient's insurance will cover the cost of the drug or if preauthorization is necessary. Fingertipformulary.com, a free and user-friendly site, allows you to select a medication, your patient's state, and insurance plan to find out if the drug will be covered. This site also tells you authorization requirements, quantity limits, and the medication's "tier" classification, which specifies the patient's copayment level.

Patient assistance programs

Needymeds.org is a nonprofit resource center of patient assistance programs (PAP) administered by pharmaceutical companies for individuals who cannot afford their medications. The site links to these programs' Web sites, application forms, and groups that can help patients fill out necessary paperwork. With this Web site, patients no longer have to request or retain PAP paperwork.

Drug interactions

Enter a drug name into the search box at Epocrates.com to learn about possible drug interactions as well as dosing information, contraindications, black-box warnings, and adverse effects. This free, continually updated Web site is invaluable when treating patients who take a large number of medications.

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Clinical trials

When you want to know what clinical trials are being conducted on a particular medication or disorder, visit clinicaltrials.gov. All federally and privately supported clinical trials now must be registered with the NIH and posted at clinicaltrials.gov. The site lists ongoing and completed trials, allows you to search by medication, disorder, and geographic area, and indicates which trials are recruiting volunteers.

Information on drug abuse

The National Institute on Drug Abuse's Drugabuse.gov provides information about substance abuse for clinicians, patients, parents, and teachers. In addition, the site features new research findings, information in Spanish, and links related to substance abuse. Click on the link for parents and teachers to access a searchable index of substance abuse treatment facilities, with information about insurance plans accepted, available treatments, and contact information.

Medication pricing

When you pull out your prescription pad, patients may ask how much a drug costs or if there is a cheaper way to buy the medication. Visit the pharmacy section of Costco.com to quickly check prices and out-of-pocket expenses, even if the patient does not buy medications from this retailer. Search by drug name to find out how much a formulation of a drug costs and if generic alternatives are available. Often this exercise will help you prescribe tablet strengths or formulations that can save the patient money.

Searching MEDLINE

You can search the National Library of Medicine's MEDLINE bibliographic database for free by visiting Pubmed.gov. You can read abstracts of all journal articles in the database and full-text of some articles. The number of free full-text articles will increase because all articles based on research funded by the NIH must now be posted on Pubmed.gov.

Support groups

We recommend support groups to most of our psychiatric patients and their families. To find support groups in your area visit:

• Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (dbsalliance.org) for patients with mood disorders

• Alcoholics Anonymous (aa.org) and Narcotics Anonymous (na.org) for patients with alcohol and other substance abuse problems

• National Alliance on Mental Illness (nami.org) for general support related to severe mental illness.

References

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2. Christensen H, Griffiths K. The Internet and mental health practice. *Evid Based Ment Health* 2003;6(3):66-9.
3. Montgomery R. Are irreputable health sites hurting your patients? *Current Psychiatry* 2006;5(12):98-100.