

Health in-sites: Patients and providers make healthy use of the Web

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realize what's available.

"Usually they want menu ideas and recipes, and it doesn't dawn on them to use the Web for that," said McCain.

She added that when clients come to her for nutrition information, typically, "They're looking for very basic information, and the detail of the data out there can be confusing."

How can patients discern credible data from virtual junk?

"There's definitely a certain level of knowledge required to tell whether information is valid or not," said McCain. "I give clients a few places to start with, like the American Dietetic Association, the American Heart Association and the American Diabetes Association. Look for nationally known associations and check out their links. If you're still not sure, ask your specialist for some reliable sites."

According to Don Caraccio, M.D., internist at Thirby Clinic in Traverse City, chair of the medical department at Munson Medical Center and member of Munson's Internet Steering Committee, "One of the best ways is to begin locally. Research has shown that 60 to 70 percent of Internet users look to their local community for healthcare-related information. From local hospital and physician sites, they can then be linked to others, like the Mayo Clinic or Cleveland Clinic."

Within the next six months, Munson Health Care plans to introduce new e-features to its site, according to Caraccio.

"Munson Health Care and independent practices are pursuing a parallel evolution. It's a work in progress that will eventually include electronic medical records, patient- and disease-specific information, local and out-of-area medical links, local health news, health risk appraisal tools and wellness information.

"What we want to do is provide a source for patients locally for credible information."

10 Healthy Web Sites

- www.ada.org American Dental Association
- www.diabetes.org American Diabetes Association
- www.eatright.org American Dietetic Association
- www.americanheart.org American Heart Association
- www.clevelandclinic.org/health The Cleveland Clinic Foundation
- www.drkoop.com Dr. Koop.com
- www.mayoclinic.com Mayo Clinic
- www.mhc.net Munson Health Care
- www.tbguide.com Traumatic Brain Injury Guide (by Dr. Glen Johnson)
- www.webmd.com WebMD

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