

Medical Advice on the Internet:

Medical advice on the Internet opens the door to a plethora of topics for the patient to discover. Healthcare information is some of the most searched for and most easily findable information available on the internet. With greater knowledge of information from the internet helps to increase a patients compliance with chronic diseases and the fact that patient has access to more medical information aids the doctor in reviewing new treatments that might benefit a patient. Another advantage of medical advice being on the internet is that it is cost effective. Every time a patient sees there local doctor they have to pay a certain amount of money, even though there may not be something wrong with them. By looking up certain diseases or medications on the internet the patient will save a large proportion of their income over the long term.

However, medical advice on the internet is outweighed by concerns of reliability and the authenticity of the information. Since the internet is anarchy, there is no guarantee that medical information is accurate. The accuracy of medical information is essential when trying to save a person's life. Some websites are not reliable and may masquerade as a medical advice site. What is bad is that the proliferations of Web sites that advocate things are known to be useless or even harmful. Sites may offer vaccines or medications that may conflict with a patient's constitution or other medications, which could become life-threatening. Not only does this affect the patient but also creates a certain amount of grief for family members and friends. Lastly, some websites promote unhealthy and illness-related behaviours. There are numerous web sites run by anorexics or bulimics that post advice on how to continue being anorexic or bulimia. This is not much different than posting instructions on how to commit suicide and could be potentially dangerous for young teenagers that are to embarrassed to go see a psychiatrist and seek the internet for advice and refuge.

Medical information is extremely useful and provides more insight for a patient. However, they must be aware of some setbacks of the information provided due to the reliability and authenticity of the information. People cannot continue to rely on external forces to get rid of bad medical information. Not only is regulating the Web legally difficult in most democratic countries but it's also technically impossible. Suing people who harm others by posting bad information may get rid of some of the garbage, but it may also drive the good medical Webmasters off the Web. To be surer of the reliability and the authenticity of the sites a patient should; (1) Ask the doctor to suggest sites that he/she thinks are well written or accurate, (2) Browse the medical professional organisations' web sites as they are specifically written for patients and families. The information that is contained on the website has been reviewed by members of the organisation for reliability and the sites are updated regularly for authentication reasons and to check if the integrity of the information remains. (3) Patients should check the website for the author's name, qualifications and the date when the page was last revised, revealing the source of financing for the site, including any potential conflicts of interest (like drug-company-financed sites), an explicitly-stated policy on privacy for site visitors, and an electronic means (which may be E-mail or a feedback form) for a visitor to contact the Webmaster.

