

Health information should be evaluated by the following 5 criteria:

Currency

Dated information can be worse than no information. Therapies widely accepted several years ago may not be current today, and health information that is more than 3 years old may be obsolete. Our print collections should be weeded by this 3-year rule, and you should try to not give out information that is more than 3 years old! Some exceptions are: medical memoirs, historical information, Chinese and Native American medicine, some alternative therapies and herbal medicines.

Completeness

Google should be your last choice, not your first! Studies have shown that when looking for health information, “using search engines and simple search terms is not efficient.” The coverage of key information is poor and inconsistent, and the reading level is often too difficult.¹

Bias

Be wary of .com sites, they most likely have a commercial/financial interest in the material they are providing. They may promote certain therapies or provide information based on their advertisers’ products and services. These are the sites that will appear more frequently in your results list if you Google your health topic.

Authority

Always check your source and provide the customer with this information. This is true for all types of research, but it’s crucial with health information because your customer may use it to make important health-related decisions.

Targeted to Audience

Always provide your customers with consumer-friendly material. Medical jargon may create barriers for many people, even the very well-educated.² Similarly, provide your customer with material in a language that he or she can understand.

K Prechtel 7/07

¹ Bertland, et.al. “Health Information on the Internet: Accessibility, Quality, and Readability in English and Spanish.” *JAMA*, 285 (May 23-30, 2001) p. 2612-2621.

² Baker, Lynda M. and Claudia J. Gollop. 2004. “Medical Textbooks: Can Lay People Read and Understand Them?” *Library Trends* 53, no. 2 (Fall): 336-337.

Additional Resources

Health Information Blogs and Listservs

- Bringing Health Information to the Community (BHIC)
<http://library.med.utah.edu/blogs/BHIC/>
By Siobhan Champ-Blackwell, Community Outreach Liaison
MidContinental Region, National Network of Libraries of Medicine
This blog focuses on health information issues related to the community, especially underserved communities and is also available as a listserv.
- MedlinePlus email lists and RSS feeds
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/cgi/medlineplus/listserv.pl?lang=EN>
Sign up to receive e-mail announcements from MedlinePlus containing links to new topics and sites containing consumer health information.

Additional Reading

Alire, Camila and Orlando Archibeque. *Serving Latino Communities: a How-To-To-It Manual for Librarians*. 1998. New York: Neal-Schuman.

Baker, Lynda M. and Virginia Manbeck. 2002. *Consumer Health Information for Public Librarians*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.

Güerena, Salvador. 2000. *Library Services to Latinos: an Anthology*. North Carolina: McFarland.

Osborne, Helen. 2005. *Health Literacy from A to Z: Practical Ways to Communicate your Health Message*. Boston, MA: Jones and Bartlett.

Ross, Catherine Sheldrick, Kirsti Nilsen and Patricia Dewdney. 2002. *Conducting the Reference Interview: A How to Do it Manual for Librarians*. New York: Neal-Schuman.

Online resources

Minority Health Resources Brochure from the National Library of Medicine
ftp://ftp.orau.gov/nlmftp/Resources/MinorityHealthBrochure_Jun2007.pdf

MedlinePlus information for librarians and trainers
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/training/trainers.html>

CAPHIS – Consumer and Patient Health Information Section of the Medical Library Association
<http://caphis.mlanet.org/>