

STDs, HIV and hepatitis C on the world wide web

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The internet is an ideal resource for both GPs and their patients; however, finding reliable, high quality websites can be arduous. Here are some website recommendations in the area of sexual health.

As medical computer software packages improve and hardware gets faster and more streamlined, increasing numbers of GPs are using computers in their practices. This, coupled with the vast range of medical conditions a GP encounters and the huge breadth of information that patients expect their doctor to possess, makes the internet an ideal resource for both GPs and self-directed patient education.

The internet is full of health sites available to everyone. These sites are not governed by any medical body, many are not peer reviewed, and they are not policed. Consequently, for those with little or no medical background the information found may be misleading, sensationalist and, in some cases, incorrect.

We have compiled below a simple, short list of sites containing up-to-date, relevant and practical information on sexual health, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and hepatitis C virus for both doctors and their patients. These sites contain information that varies in complexity, and their usefulness will

depend on the doctor's interest and needs. For the patient, lay terms are used, and many sites conveniently contain information sheets that can be downloaded and used as handouts.

STDs in general For the doctor

www.acshp.org.au

Included in the Australasian College of Sexual Health Physicians' website is a directory of sexual health services and sexual assault services throughout Australia and New Zealand. There are useful links to other sexual health sites and relevant journals.

For the doctor and patient

www.cdc.gov/std/treatment

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) treatment guidelines provided at this website offer up-to-date information on bacterial and viral STDs, HIV, hepatitis C, and sexual assault. There are useful fact sheets for patients using lay terms on conditions such as bacterial vaginosis, chlamydia, gonorrhoea, genital herpes, HIV, syphilis and trichomonas.

For the patient

www.ashastd.org

The website for the American Social Health Association offers information on most STDs, as well as answers to frequently asked questions.



For the patient who does not read English

www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au

This site is produced by NSW Health's multicultural communications branch. By following the 'sexual health' link, easy to read fact sheets for various STDs can be downloaded in different languages for patient education.

Genital herpes

For the doctor

www.ihmf.org

The International Herpes Management Forum offers treatment guidelines and algorithms for all the human herpes viruses, including herpes simplex virus types 1 and 2, and covers treatment in pregnancy and the neonate. There are also links to other resources.

www.herpes.on.net

This is the Australian Herpes Management forum website. It offers a detailed overview of herpes, including management guidelines and clinical photos.

For the patient

www.herpes.com.au

This is an Australian website offering patients information about transmission, diagnosis and management, and also practical information regarding safe sex. There is a herpes newsletter and links to other herpes sites.

Genital warts

For the doctor and patient

www.hpv.org.nz

The New Zealand HPV Project has information for both the clinician and

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the patient. For the doctor, there are clinical management guidelines and links to relevant clinical papers. For the patient, there are patient guidelines and information presented as questions and answers.

HIV infection

For the doctor

www.ashm.org.au

From the Australasian Society for HIV Medicine (ASHM) website, HIV treatment and testing policies, as well as post-exposure prophylaxis guidelines, can be downloaded. Among the useful links to other sites are specific sites for GPs.

www.aidsinfo.nih.gov

Sponsored by the US Department of Health, this site lists treatment information and up-to-date guidelines. There is also the option of emailing the authors directly for specific treatment questions.

For the patient

www.acon.org.au

The AIDS Council of NSW website offers information for HIV positive men and women on treatments, support and management issues surrounding HIV. It is aimed at the gay and lesbian community.

www.thebody.com

This site offers patients who are HIV positive the opportunity to directly email doctors anonymously with any question they may have regarding HIV. The answers are given in lay terms and posted on the site for others to read. The site also offers discussion and support groups.

In our experience, caution should be exercised in giving this site address to the 'worried well' and very anxious patients. The information that it contains is quite detailed.

Reproductive health

For the patient

www.fpahealth.org.au

The Family Planning Association's website

has fact sheets that can be downloaded for patients. There is also a list of useful directories, including sexual health clinics, women's health and family planning centres, counselling services and HIV/AIDS information lines.

Vulvodynia

For the doctor

www.aafp.org

At this site, produced by the American Academy of Family Physicians, type 'vulvodynia' in the search box to obtain information regarding diagnosis and management of vulvodynia and vestibulitis. There are easy to read tables and helpful photos of differing conditions. There are also links to patient handouts and fact sheets.

For the patient

www.vulvarpainfoundation.org/index

This is the website of the Vulvar Pain Foundation, an American organisation offering information and support for women suffering vulval pain.

Hepatitis C

For the doctor and patient

www.hepatitisc.org.au

The website of the Hepatitis C Council of NSW has good patient information and links to other sites for both doctors and patients.

Summary

In summary, by spending a little time looking at these sites and storing them under 'favourite' websites on your computer, information from the internet can prove to be a valuable resource for both you and your patients. MT

Websites may be partially or wholly commercially funded; such information should be clearly available on the site. The websites cited in this article were current at the time of press; however, the addresses and content are subject to change.