Reduce, reuse, recycle

by Cynthia Johnson

In the television classic *Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, a hapless set of characters inhabit a place known as the Island of Misfit Toys. You may remember the misnamed Charlie-in-the-Box, the bird that swam instead of flew, or the spotted elephant—functional yet imperfect toys just waiting for someone to appreciate them.

You may have a similar “island” of sorts at your organization.

Be it a closet, a warehouse, or a storage room, it’s the place where defunct medical equipment and supplies go out to pasture when state-of-the-art items arrive to take their place. In most cases, these ultrasound machines, hospital beds, and wheelchairs are still serviceable, but they no longer meet your organization’s needs.

In the spirit of “one person’s trash is another person’s treasure,” New Haven, CT–based REMEDY, Inc., Recovered Medical Equipment for the Developing World (www.remedyinc.org), has created an online service called Med-Eq (www.med-eq.org). The site connects donors of medical equipment and supplies with registered 501c3 nonprofit charities.

“The charity has to be a registered 501c3 charity, specifically because we do not want these items ending up in black market sales or going to any type of misuse,” says Tammy Young, executive director of REMEDY, Inc.

The donors post descriptions and photographs of the items they no longer need and let charities determine whether they can use them. If they do, the charities submit a request for an item. Once Med-Eq selects a charity to receive the item, the organization connects them directly with the donor to arrange for shipment.

The site works similarly to popular classified Web sites like Craigslist (www.craigslist.org) and eBay (www.ebay.com); however, Med-Eq and the donors do not receive payment for the transaction. The charities pay for shipping, and the donors receive a tax deduction, more storage room, and a feeling of good will.

Getting the right items to the right recipients

Health Equipment Recycling Organization, or HERO (www.fmhero.org), has been posting items on Med-Eq for two months. For the past 10 years, the Moorhead, MN–based organization has been
REMEDIY
continued from p. 1

collecting and redistributing donated healthcare materials locally, nationally, and internationally to benefit those in need.

When the folks at HERO receive medical equipment that the local organizations they work with can’t use, they turn to Med-Eq for assistance. Georgia Dufault, office manager at HERO, posts detailed descriptions and photographs of the items on the site.

“I’ve been listing items on Med-Eq, trying to get them out of my warehouse and into the hands of people who need them,” says Dufault. She says that “perfectly good medical equipment” is wasted when it sits on the shelves in her 3,200-square-foot warehouse. “We want to keep equipment moving and get it out into the hands of people who can use it, who have a place that they can send it to, and who need it,” she says.

Instead of searching for organizations that can use the item she wants to recycle, Dufault uses Med-Eq to post the item and have interested charities contact her. Dufault, one of two paid employees at HERO, says that she doesn’t have the time to research mission groups or organizations that are looking for items.

Using Med-Eq has also allowed her to cultivate a network of organizations that she can work with in the future. So far, she has created six new relationships through the site.

“It’s creating new partnerships with organizations that are a lot bigger than we are,” she says.

Dufault encourages others to try the site, describing it as very user-friendly. “It’s really gotten us into contact with some groups that are willing to put out a little money to get items shipped,” she says. “People are more than willing to put out a little effort to get items that they need in third-world countries.”

Ghana clinic opening with help from Med-Eq donations

Adakum Educational Foundation (ADMEF), Inc., (www.admef.org) in New York City is a 501c3 nonprofit organization working to promote education and healthy living in the Republic of Ghana in West Africa. The organization currently supports L&A Memorial Academy in Ghana. They are in the process of opening a school clinic at the academy staffed by a full-time nurse who will provide preventive healthcare for students and their parents.

The organization began using Med-Eq two months ago. “They’ve been leading us to some of the medical items that we’ve been looking for,” says Japhet Aryiku, chair of the board of directors for ADMEF. Although they can’t use the “heavy-duty” medical equipment posted on the site, he says they are able to use items like wheelchairs and diabetes testing equipment.

Recently, Med-Eq put them in touch with a couple in Queens, NY, who donated wheelchairs, a blood glucose meter, and testing strips. Aryiku says the couple expressed a keen interest in the work that the organization is trying to accomplish. He says that children in Ghana commonly suffer from malaria,
stomach problems from waterborne diseases, and skin rashes due to the extreme heat. “None of these African children have had any medical checkups all through their lives,” says Aryiku. “They grow up with all kinds of illnesses that cripple them in their old age.”

The adults suffer from diabetes and high blood pressure; diseases that he says are “killing Africans all over the country.” He hopes to have a program in place where the clinic can test parents’ sugar levels when they drop off or pick up their children from school and, if the medication is available, provide them with insulin or advise them that their sugar level is high and how they can manage it.

This past June, a group of medical students from Robert Wood Johnson Medical School traveled to Ghana to help start up the school clinic.

“This clinic is very important to me,” says Aryiku. “I’m just hoping that I can meet the right people who can help us to demonstrate that with very little amount of money, we can come up with preventive healthcare that can save a lot of people in Africa, starting with the children.”

The start of something big

The Med-Eq site is the brainchild of William H. Rosenblatt, MD, a professor of anesthesiology at Yale University School of Medicine in New Haven, CT. During his volunteer medical mission trips to Latin American hospitals, Rosenblatt observed that they lacked the supplies needed to treat patients. In the United States, he noticed that ORs and ERs were discarding these same clean supplies on a regular basis.

“It became clear that the donations were out there,” says Young.

Items prepared but not used during a medical procedure in the United States are discarded because they are considered unsterile even if there has been no contact at all with a patient.

Due to legal concerns, the supplies are not usable in this country, but many U.S.-based charitable organizations are more than eager to accept and distribute them throughout the developing world.

In 1991, Rosenblatt founded REMEDY, Inc., using grant funding. The group of healthcare professionals and others recover opened-but-unused surgical supplies. The nonprofit organization promotes the recovery of unused medical supplies for the purpose of global aid, waste reduction, and cost-effectiveness.

The organization, which was started at Yale, currently has 643 U.S. hospitals and 1,051 recipient charities participating in the program. The hospitals collect exposed-but-unused medical supplies from their ORs and ERs, and REMEDY pairs them with a recipient charity that can arrange to send them to third-world countries that need the supplies.

Grassroots initiative gains momentum

The program evolved when REMEDY started receiving calls from people who wanted to unload large equipment, such as x-ray machines and ambulances, instead of the usual bandages, surgical gloves, and IV tubing. Even though a hospital in Chicago could be paired with a recipient charity that sends supplies to South Africa, that doesn’t mean that the x-ray machine the hospital is trying to offload can be used in the rainforest.

In 1998, the organization compiled a list of 300–400 recipient charities. When donors would notify them that they had a large item, REMEDY would send out a mass e-mail to the charities letting them know that the item was available.

As interest grew, so did the number of subscribers, of course. As a result, they began experiencing technology glitches using this system.

To remedy these glitches, the Med-Eq site launched in November 2005, allowing donors to post items online rather than REMEDY attempting to pair these larger items with recipient charities. They developed the site in cooperation with the Office of International Health of Yale University.

continued on p. 4

Supplies that can be recovered

Some examples of supplies that can be recovered by implementing REMEDY at your facility include sponges, bandages, burn dressings, tubing, sheets, syringes, IV sets, catheters, gauze, specimen containers, staple removers, and surgical gowns.
Once a donor posts an item, the site sends an e-mail to recipient members of Med-Eq who can go on the Web site to request the item if they are interested in receiving it.

“In most cases, depending on whether or not it’s a mainstream item or something that is a little bit more specific, we get results back within a day—if not quicker,” says Young.

Med-Eq then chooses a recipient organization based on its capacity and its proximity to the donor. Next, it contacts the charity, informing the organization that it has been selected and providing the donor’s contact information. It’s then up to the charity to contact the donor organization and make shipping arrangements.

’Tis better to give than to receive

As the Med-Eq tool has evolved, so have the donors. Young says that they are receiving donations from large medical companies, such as Princeton, NJ–based Tyco International, Inc., and New Britain, CT–based Moore Medical, that are looking to clear items out of warehouses.

Physicians and dentists are also using the service when they close their practice or retire, Young says. In these cases, they donate their entire office. “We’ve had dental offices and gynecological offices donate everything from specialty tables, chairs, tools, and tongue depressors as part of the package.”

They have also received donations from individuals who have had loved ones receiving care at home and have equipment they can no longer use. Recently, Young says a man donated a brace that his wife used when she was recovering from a back injury. “Medical supplies are very expensive,” says Young. “Most people don’t want to throw these items out. This gives them an outlet to get rid of these supplies, take the tax deduction, and feel like they’re doing some good.”

In the future, the organization may turn to Web sponsorship to keep it afloat so the site can be self-sustaining and it can continue its policy of not charging members for the service.

“Obviously, as it grows, it’s going to be a little bit more cumbersome to deal with, but we’re definitely prepared,” says Young.

New on the net

California firefighters, paramedics using PDAs

San Marcos, CA, firefighters and paramedics used to spend 30 minutes to an hour completing paperwork for the average 13 medical calls they completed in a 24-hour shift.

According to The San Diego Union Tribune, they now use FieldSaver PDAs loaded with customized electronic menus that reduce the procedure to about 10 minutes. The PDAs allow firefighters and paramedics to get back to the field faster and attend to the needs of the city’s expanding population. The one-time startup fee for the program is $40,000, and the operating and maintenance fees are $6,000 per year. The charge is not based on the number of PDAs but rather the number of primary ambulances.

Delbenco resigns as CEO of Leapfrog Group

Suzanne Delbenco, PhD, announced her intention to leave her post as CEO of the Grand Rapids, MI–based Leapfrog Group, a consortium of large employers and other purchasers of healthcare, sometime this fall. Delbenco helped launch the organization in 2000.

Louisiana hospital using new surgery system

St. Tammany Parish Hospital of Covington, LA, has unveiled its “da Vinci robot,” which will allow surgeons to perform complex procedures in a minimally invasive manner. The robot increases the capability of
surgeons and allows a range of procedures to be performed more quickly and easily through smaller incisions.

“The da Vinci robot combines superior 3D imaging with dexterity, precision, and control to produce breakthrough capabilities for our surgeons,” Nancy Ledet, director of surgical services at St. Tammany Parish Hospital, said in a prepared statement. “We are proud to provide this advanced level of technology for the highly skilled and caring professionals we work with to improve care for our surgical patients.”

Rhode Island awards EHR network contract

The Rhode Island Department of Health announced that it has awarded Plano, TX–based EDS a three-year contract to design, implement, and manage the nation’s first statewide electronic health records (EHR) network.

According to the Providence Business News, the network will consolidate the health information of Rhode Island residents, providing authorized doctors, hospitals, and pharmacists with a more complete patient health file.

The contract includes four 12-month options and is expected to go live in the summer of 2008.

Joint Commission names Chassin its next president

The Oakbrook Terrace, IL–based Joint Commission has named Mark R. Chassin, MD, MPP, MPH, as its next president, effective January 1, 2008. Chassin replaces Dennis O’Leary, MD, who is retiring.

Chassin is the Edmond A. Guggenheim Professor of Health Policy and chair of the Department of Health Policy and the executive vice president for excellence in patient care at the Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York City.

Indiana hospital data lapse involves 51,000 patients

St. Vincent Indianapolis Hospital said about 51,000 patients’ personal information (names, addresses, and Social Security numbers) was made available on the Internet in the spring because of a security lapse by a subcontractor.

According to the The Indianapolis Star, the hospital says that all of the patients affected have been notified by letter. St. Vincent is providing patients’ with a free credit report and free credit monitoring service for one year.

The lapse occurred when a subcontracted technician who was developing a medical-billing site for St. Vincent made a change to an Internet server, making the patient data from a test Web site publicly available through Internet searches.

Minnesota clinic suspends employees for violating privacy

More than 100 Minneapolis-based Park Nicollet Clinic employees have

Oregon launches hospital comparison site

Oregon has become the third state in the nation to offer a Web site for consumers to compare the cost of services at hospitals throughout the state. According to KOIN News 6, The new Compare Hospital Costs Web site shows the average amount that is actually paid to hospitals, reflecting discounts that insurers and hospitals negotiate.

Consumers can choose a procedure on the site, select hospitals that interest them, and view the average and median payments at each hospital for the surgery. The site contains information for more than 82 common medical conditions or procedures.

For more information, visit www.oregon.gov/DAS/OHPRP/RSCH/comparehospitalcosts.shtml

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Minnesota clinic suspends employees for violating privacy

More than 100 Minneapolis-based Park Nicollet Clinic employees have
been suspended this year for violating federal laws on patient privacy.

According to the Star Tribune, the employees tapped into electronic records of relatives or friends. The clinic has a zero-tolerance policy regarding patient confidentiality. The clinic suspended the employees for three days without pay.

**VA computer equipment missing**

Government auditors have reported that investigators could not find more than a quarter of the assigned computer equipment at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Washington, DC. According to the San Diego Union Tribune, three other VA facilities showed better results, but investigators still could not locate between 6%–11% of the equipment.

The equipment includes computers, hard drives, monitors, and other devices.

The four facilities included in the audit reported more than 2,400 missing items originally worth $6.4 million.

The auditors said much of the equipment that could be found was not where inventory records said it should be. Equipment was often moved or set aside for discard without documentation.

**Hospital to launch live interpretation service**

Miami Valley Hospital of Dayton, OH, has signed a two-year agreement with Columbus, OH–based Language Access Network, Inc. According to the Dayton Business Journal, the company will provide its My Accessible Real-Time Trusted Interpreter, a live video/audio interpretation service that interacts in Spanish, American Sign Language, and 150 other languages.

The contract is based on a per-minute use fee, with a minimum requirement of 1,000 minutes per month. The company’s rates range from $1.75 to $2.95 per minute, and the average patient encounter with interpreting lasts seven to 12 minutes.

**Error at Arizona hospital sends patient $49 million bill**

Hundreds of people who were treated at Northern Cochise Community Hospital in Wilcox, AZ, received exorbitant medical bills—one as high as $49 million—due to a computer error.

A malfunction in new computer software affected statements for as many as 587 patients who were treated at the hospital.

**Hospital uses new IT system to shorten ER wait time**

The emergency department at Pocono Medical Center (PMC) in East Stroudsburg, PA, is using a new IT system to shorten the time patients have to wait for care.

According to the Northeast Pennsylvania Business Journal, PMC uses a Web-based software package called PulseCheck by Picis Corporation of Wakefield, MA.

PulseCheck combines functions such as triage, patient tracking, physician and nursing documentation, risk management, charge management, and prescription writing.
Federal investigators probe CDC $22 million equipment loss

Federal investigators will look into the disappearance of $22 million worth of scientific equipment and other items from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta.

According to The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, an audit of procedures and an investigation into allegations of theft at the agency will be conducted by the Inspector General’s office of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

CDC officials have accounted for about $9 million of the $22 million in missing goods in recent weeks.

Computer glitch leaves subscribers without insurance

Although 950 Massachusetts residents paid for the state-subsidized Commonwealth Care health insurance program to begin August 1, a computer glitch prevented them from having immediate coverage.

According to The Boston Globe, the problem stemmed from a computer program that was supposed to automatically send a message to the state’s health insurance authority once it received payment for the plan.

The program failed to do so, but the state was unaware of the problem until new subscribers tried to use their plans on August 1.

The state has since fixed the problem and promised to activate coverage for those affected.

Pennsylvania payer enhances online tools for members

Independence Blue Cross (IBC), a Pennsylvania-based health insurance provider, will offer expanded online health tools for members.

The package includes personalized tools for smoking cessation, weight management, diet and nutrition, stress management, fitness and exercise, and back pain.

The program contains tools like the Smoke-U-Lator, which calculates how much money a person can save by quitting smoking.

“Most people have good intentions to change unhealthy behaviors, but lack the ongoing support they need to stick to their programs or goals,” says Esther J. Nash, MD, senior medical director at IBC, in a recent HealthLeaders News brief. “These online modules make health information available to members when it’s convenient for them, in a fast and friendly way.”

Ohio awards EDS $100 million Medicaid contract

EDS of Plano, TX, has signed a $100.8 million, 73-month contract with the state of Ohio to design, develop, and implement a new-generation Medicaid Information Technology System (MITS). The system will provide IT services to Ohio’s 43,000 Medicaid providers and 1.7 million recipients. The agreement includes a 36-month implementation plan.

The new system will provide the state with greater flexibility and will provide faster and more reliable claims processing.

Web site helps people with health conditions and STDs connect

Prescription4Love.com, an online dating service specializing in particular health circumstances, has added additional categories to its social networking site. Users can now explore the following categories: epilepsy, arthritis, little people, multiple sclerosis, paraplegic quadriplegic, transplant patients, Parkinson’s disease, burn victims, lupus, and human papillomavirus. In addition to these conditions, the site also includes STD conditions and feature preferences of the tools.
New on the net

processing for healthcare providers. It will also provide the state with vital data about healthcare trends and the medical needs of Ohio’s population.

Vermont hospital to transition to digital record keeping

After three months of preparation, Central Vermont Medical Center in Barre will start converting paper files to electronic medical records. According to The Barre Montpelier Times Argus, the system will keep track of medications and cross-check for drug interactions and reactions. Prescriptions entered from exam rooms will show up in pharmacies’ computers within seconds.

Kaiser Family Foundation launches health08.org

The Kaiser Family Foundation of Washington, DC, has launched a new Web site that provides analysis of health policy issues, public opinion surveys, and news and video coverage from the presidential campaign trail.

The site, health08.org, is available free of charge and does not include advertising. Some features of the site include:

» Summaries of health reform proposals
» Kaiser tracking surveys examining the public’s view on health issues
» Video and podcasts from the campaign trail
» Interviews with candidates and others in the health reform debate
» Candidates pages with links to the health positions and other resources

Diabetes Web site launches

Rick Smolan, a former photographer for Time, Life, and National Geographic, is creating a photo exhibit of people living with type 2 diabetes. He invites people with type 2 diabetes to visit www.FaceOfChange-us.com to submit their photo and share information about how they manage their diabetes. The photo and accompanying personal stories will travel to major cities this year, ending in New York.
The kids are back in school. This means the end of summer boredom but the beginning of figuring out what to put in your child’s lunchbox. With so many children suffering from food allergies, a number of items—the most notorious being peanut butter—are off limits. If you are the parent of a child with an allergy, this time of year means ensuring that safety precautions are in place at your child’s school should he or she have an allergic reaction or asthma attack during the school day.

Parents should begin their allergy and asthma research by visiting the Allergy & Asthma Network Mothers of Asthmatics site (www.breatherville.org). Users can take free courses and learn how to eliminate allergens and how to work with their child’s school to ensure his or her safety.

The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology (www.aaaai.org) is a reputable source for information about a wide array of topics such as allergic skin conditions, childhood asthma, food allergy, stinging insect allergy, and more.

Last, be sure to check out the American Lung Association site at www.lungusa.org. Its Asthma section discusses how the condition affects specific populations. It also contains fact sheets, offers ways to manage asthma, and includes an online club for kids.

A number of allergy and asthma resources are described and reviewed in the following pages, as listed in the index below, using the five-star system to rate each on content, interface, and style.

**Allergy & Asthma Network Mothers of Asthmatics**  
www.breatherville.org  
**Ratings:** Content: ***** Interface: **** Style: ****

Founded in 1985, Allergy & Asthma Network Mothers of Asthmatics (AANMA) is a national nonprofit network of families working to overcome allergies and asthma. They are dedicated to “eliminating suffering and death due to asthma and allergies through education, advocacy, community outreach, and research.” The AANMA provides families with information via its magazine, newsletter, e-news updates, toll-free helpline, programs, and Web site.

Some key features of this site include:

- Access to free online courses about allergies and asthma (enrollment required).
- An Advocacy section containing information about important allergy and asthma issues.
- A Pharmacy section containing information about medications, medical devices, and consumer tips.
» A Medical Center section that teaches users how to find and work with a physician. It also offers advice about dealing with asthma and allergy emergencies. Here, users can also learn about flu, eye allergies, clinical trials, and more.
» Answers to common child care questions for those raising children with allergies or asthma.
» Advice about eliminating allergens and irritants in the home to provide children with a healthy living space.
» Articles that discuss how pets can affect allergies and asthma.
» A Farmer’s Market section that contains information about food allergies, such as what causes them, what symptoms to look for, and how to handle severe reactions.
» Information about how to keep children with asthma and allergies safe in the school setting.
» Games and activities for children.
» News articles.

Unique elements: The site is interactive. Click on the Expo Center link to learn more about the companies that research and develop medical devices and medications. Click on a company’s logo to learn more about its products.

Comments: The site has an online store containing posters, publications, videos, and medical devices.

Cost: Free. Users can opt to join the AANMA and receive membership benefits, such as the quarterly magazine. You can also opt to register with the site without becoming a member to receive e-mail announcements.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: allergy, asthma, Allergy & Asthma Network Mothers of Asthmatics, AANMA, Breatherville, USA.

American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology
www.aaaai.org

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: ***** Style: *****

Established in 1943, the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI) represents allergists, asthma specialists, clinical immunologists, allied health professionals, and others who have a special interest in the research and treatment of allergic disease. The organization’s mission is “the advancement of the knowledge and practice of allergy, asthma, and immunology for optimal patient care.”

There are three areas of interest on this site: Patients & Consumers, Professionals, and Members. Each provides information specific to the targeted audience.

The Patients & Consumers section contains online tools such as pollen counts, an allergist/immunologist finder, and a medication guide. The section also offers brochures of tips that cover a wide array of topics for patients with allergic diseases such as skin allergies, childhood asthma, food allergy, stinging insect allergy, and much more.

The site posts the latest relevant news articles in the section’s Today’s Health eHeadlines area. At the time of this review, the section also contained a summer allergy guide that explained summertime allergies and contained tips for treatment and prevention.

The Professionals section is where users will find information about the AAAAI, such as how to become a member, but it also contains information about careers in the field, news items, and resources. One of the Webcasts provided on the site covers how pay for performance will affect allergists.

Be sure to check out the Patient Gallery. It contains both general and detailed information on childhood asthma, adult asthma, food allergies, anaphylaxis, prevention of allergies and asthma, insect sting allergy, rhinitis and sinusitis, and skin allergies.

Unique elements: Users can download a copy of the Allergy & Asthma ADVOCATE patient newsletter for personal use at no charge.

Comments: The site is also available in Spanish.

Cost: The majority of the site is available free of charge with certain areas restricted to members only.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: allergy, asthma, immunology, American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, & Immunology, AAAAI.
American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology
www.acaai.org

Ratings: Content: **** Interface: **** Style: ****

Based in Arlington Heights, IL, the American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (ACAAI) is a professional association of allergists and immunologists dedicated to “improving the quality of patient care in allergy and immunology through research, advocacy, and professional public education.” ACAAI online is an information and news service for patients, parents of patients, members, the news media, and purchasers of health programs. Information on the site is available in Spanish.

The Member Information section is where users can expect to find annual meeting details, application forms, committee information, membership information, practice resources, and more. Some of the highlights from this section include a distance learning section that contains online continuing medical education courses. There’s also a job source database service that lets users post and search for employment opportunities.

The Patient Education section contains a great deal of reputable information in an easy-to-use format. For example, check out the alphabetized list of both allergy and asthma topics and the glossary of terms. Other resources include links to patient support organizations, interactive quizzes, and answers to FAQs.

The site contains an online allergist locator tool. The ACAAI also operates a nationwide allergist referral service with a toll-free number.

Unique elements: The Patient Education section contains a checklist that helps consumers evaluate the allergy and asthma benefits in health plans.

Comments: The Web site is made possible, in part, by an educational grant from AstraZeneca.

Cost: The majority of the site is available free of charge with certain areas, such as the listservs, reserved for members only.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: allergy, asthma, immunology, American College of Allergy, Asthma, & Immunology, ACAAI.

American Lung Association: Asthma & Allergy
www.lungusa.org

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: **** Style: *****

The mission of the American Lung Association (ALA) is “to prevent lung disease and promote lung health.” Founded in 1904 to fight tuberculosis, the association—the oldest voluntary health organization in the United States—now focuses its efforts on asthma, tobacco control, and environmental health.

To find the asthma content on the site, click the Asthma link on the top banner of the home page or click the Allergy link to get to allergy-related content. Each link displays a drop-down button so users can select an individual topic within the section, such as Asthma & Adults or Allergy Information.
The Asthma section contains information about how asthma affects specific populations, such as older people, adults, and children. You can click on the Asthma & Adults or Asthma & Children links within the left-hand navigation bar to learn more. These areas offer patients an asthma control test, a fact sheet, information about occupational asthma, and trends in morbidity and mortality. The Asthma & Children section also contains a link to an online club for kids, information about childhood asthma, ways to control it, a fact sheet, and much more. If you have a patient or child with asthma, this is the go-to place for content.

The Allergy section has two links within its navigation page. The Allergy Information link opens a section that contains an allergy map, avoidance measures for allergic rhinitis, home control of asthma and allergies, tips for controlling dust mites, and trigger information. The For Professionals link opens a section that contains links to information about educational opportunities, data and statistics, and information on initiatives and programs.

Unique elements: Click on the Asthma Publications link to view the American Lung Association Family Guide to Asthma and Allergies.

Comments: The association conducts surveys of asthma sufferers to improve the services that it offers.

Cost: Free. If you like what you see, don’t forget to sign up for the association’s e-newsletters.

RSS XML link: www.lungusa.org/site/apps/nl/rss2.asp?c=dvLUK900E&b=1578375

Keywords: allergy, asthma, asthma management, American Lung Association, ALA.

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America
www.aafa.org

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: **** Style: ****

The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America helps consumers and patients learn more about asthma and allergies. The site contains multiple navigation bars, which can make it a bit confusing to find what you’re looking for.

For information about asthma, click on the Asthma tab on the home page. You can select from one of the three submenus (Asthma Overview, Allergic Asthma, and Non-allergic Asthma) or click on the tab to begin with asthma overview. Users can access this section’s multimedia library, which contains videos and articles, by clicking on the link on the left-hand side of the page. The section also houses a glossary of terms.

Overall, the asthma section contains an abundance of information about the causes, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of the condition. The left-hand navigation bar for this section links to facts and figures, asthma capitals, and clinical trials.

The Allergy section is equally impressive. It houses similar information about what allergies are, what causes them, and their diagnosis, treatment, and prevention. It also houses a multimedia library and a glossary of terms like the Asthma section does.

The allergies addressed in this section include indoor, outdoor, food and drug, latex, insect, skin, and eye. Be sure to take a look at the left-hand navigation bar. It contains links to allergy facts and figures, allergy capitals, and information about clinical trials.

The association also offers educational programs and tools for patients, caregivers, and health professionals. Click on the Education link to learn more. Many resources are available in Spanish.

Other tools on the site help users locate local support groups and chapters.

Unique elements: Users can send the foundation an e-mail (info@aafa.org) requesting a free kit of educational information.

Comments: The site contains an Ask the Allergist tool.

Cost: The majority of the site is free, with certain areas restricted by a login.

RSS XML link: None.
Keywords: allergy, asthma, support groups, Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, AAFA.

Environmental Protection Agency: Asthma
www.epa.gov
Ratings: Content: **** Interface: **** Style: ****

The mission of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is “to protect human health and the environment.” The Washington, DC–based agency has been in existence since 1970.

To access the EPA Web site’s content about asthma, click on the Quick Finder link on the home page and then select Asthma from the alphabetized list. This is the easiest way to navigate to the content. Other topics worth exploring include air and indoor air quality. Once at the Asthma section, select from any of the topics located in the left-hand navigation list. A good place to start is the Basic Information section. It contains content related to asthma triggers, facts, answers to FAQs, and ways to prevent asthma attacks.

For information about what may cause asthma, click on Indoor Environmental Asthma Triggers. This section contains content related to common indoor asthma triggers, such as secondhand smoke, dust mites, pests, pets, and combustion byproducts. You can click on the individual links for these triggers to learn more about them.

Other resources on the site include public awareness and media campaigns, publications, contact lists, external links, and more.

Unique elements: All of the asthma resources located within the Publications section are available at no cost. Here, users will find information about topics such as creating an asthmatic-friendly home, controlling asthma triggers, and managing asthma in a school environment.

Comments: Be sure to investigate one of the links located on the right-hand side of the asthma section. Here, among other information, you’ll find information designed for health professionals, such as new asthma studies and how to help patients manage environmental asthma triggers.

Cost: Free.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: asthma, air, indoor air quality, Environmental Protection Agency, EPA.

The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network
www.foodallergy.org
Ratings: Content: **** Interface: ** Style: ***

Established in 1991, the Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network (FAAN) works to “raise public awareness, to provide advocacy and education, and to advance research on behalf of all those affected by food allergies and anaphylaxis.” The organization represents families, dieticians, nurses, physicians, school staff members, representatives from government agencies, and the food and pharmaceutical industries.

Some of the links on the home page open to sections that are not in keeping with the home page’s design, so don’t fret if you think you’ve left the site altogether. And stick around because the site has a lot to offer despite the work it needs in the areas of interface and style.

Some of the key features of this site include:
» Answers to FAQs, such as the common symptoms of allergic reaction
» Information and resources regarding common food allergies, such as milk, egg, peanut, fish, soy, and wheat allergies, and much more

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School and camp resources, including guidelines for managing students/campers with food allergies
Advocacy pages about areas such as food labeling, emergency medical services, restaurants, and airlines
Research highlights, including a PDF titled “The Importance of Food Allergy Research”
PDF downloads such as information sheets, brochures, food allergy action plans, and guidelines
Two Web sites that contain content aimed specifically at teens and kids

Other resources on the site include recipes, fundraising information, and news articles.

Unique elements: Users can sign up to receive allergy alerts by e-mail from the network, such as recall information about food products.

Comments: The site is available in both English and Spanish.

Cost: The majority of the site is available for free, with certain areas restricted to members only. The site contains an online store that houses FAAN publications for members.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: allergy, food allergy, anaphylaxis, The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network, FAAN.

Global Initiative for Asthma
www.ginasthma.com

Ratings: Content: **** Interface: **** Style: ****

The Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA) works with healthcare professionals and public health officials around the world to reduce asthma prevalence, morbidity, and mortality. GINA was launched in 1993 in collaboration with the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, National Institutes of Health, and the World Health Organization.

The Guidelines & Resources section of the site is where users can access information about the guidelines, reports, and other asthma resources that GINA produces. The documents can be downloaded through the site. Sample titles include: Pocket Guide for Asthma Management and Prevention, Global Burden of Asthma, and Instructions for Inhaler and Spacer Use.

For those suffering from asthma and those supporting people who have asthma, the Patients section of the site contains answers to some of the most often asked questions about asthma, as well as resources. The About Asthma area contains information about the basics of what it means to have asthma. It includes a patient guide and links to useful asthma Web sites.

Unique elements: The Patients section contains interactive learning offerings. Sample titles include Asthma, Asthma in Children, and Bubbliboo: Asthma Education for Young Children.

Comments: The publications are available in a number of different languages.

Cost: Free.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: asthma, asthma management, asthma evidence-based guidelines, Global Initiative for Asthma, GINA.

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
www3.niaid.nih.gov

Ratings: Content: **** Interface: *** Style: ****

The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) conducts and supports basic and applied research to better understand, treat, and prevent infectious, immunologic, and allergic diseases.

If you are looking for information about allergies and asthma, start by clicking on the Health & Science Topics link to access the A–Z Health & Science Topics list and search for topics individually, such as allergic diseases, asthma, and food allergies. There’s no easy method to find one section on this site that has everything it offers regarding asthma and allergies. However, when you click on a link, the pages that display contain a good deal of reputable information, such
The site was developed under a cooperative agreement with the EPA and is managed by the Ad Council, a producer of public service announcements.

NoAttacks.org contains information about the obvious (dust) and not-so-obvious triggers (stuffed animals) and how users can eliminate them. The Preventing Attacks section outlines a three-step process that users can follow to avert attacks: talk to a doctor, make a plan, and asthma-proof your home.

The For Kids section contains games that children learn about asthma triggers and how to avoid attacks. Sample games include crossword puzzles, mazes, connect-the-dots, coloring pages, and seek-and-find. The site also contains English and Spanish television, radio, and print ads about asthma that have been part of the NoAttacks.org campaign.

Unique elements: The site contains a free Asthma Action Plan and card that users can download to use at home, school, and with babysitters. In the event of an attack, it will provide information to caregivers so they will know what to do.

Comments: Users can take a “Smoke-free Home Pledge” on the site.

Cost: Free. If you like the content on the site, click on the Subscribe to Our Newsletter link on the home page to receive more information.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: asthma, preventing asthma attacks, NoAttacks, Environmental Protection Agency, EPA.
OH-TOE-LAR-IN-GAH-LOE-GEE. Of course, it’s easier to refer to the specialty as ENT (or ears, nose, and throat), but the proper terminology for head and neck surgery is otolaryngology. This is the medical field that specializes in treating conditions of the ears, nose, throat, head, and neck. But ENT is only part of the picture.

Due to the breadth of the specialty, there aren’t many sites dedicated to the whole of the field. Most are concentrated on the subspecialties and specific conditions. Subspecialties within otolaryngology span across disciplines, including plastic and reconstructive surgery, oncology, endocrinology, immunology, etc. When searching for information about otolaryngology from a patient’s perspective, it’s usually best to seek information about the condition/procedure or area of the body—for example, try searching for ear problems (e.g., otitis media), nose problems (e.g., sinusitis), throat problems (e.g., tonsillitis), or neck problems (e.g., laryngeal cancer).

Most informational Web sites are patient pages from medical facility sites. Additionally, professional societies, governmental organizations, and universities provide reliable and timely otolaryngology information. I have selected the following sites for the quality and scope of the information they provide:

**American Academy of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery**

[www.entnet.org/healthinfo](http://www.entnet.org/healthinfo)

The origin of the American Academy of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery (AAO-HNS) is more than a century old, but at one time, the organization was not only for otolaryngologists but for ophthalmologists too. In 1978, the academy separated from ophthalmology to form two separate professional organizations. It now represents the professional and educational interests of more than 12,000 otolaryngologists.

The academy has divided its content into two separate sites, one for the public and press ([www.entnet.org](http://www.entnet.org)) and one for professionals ([www.entlink.net](http://www.entlink.net)).

The public site is by far the most comprehensive source of otolaryngology information online. The section highlighted in the link at the beginning of this AAO-HNS entry is the “Patient Health Information Index,” which features fact pages and articles organized topically. There are numerous photos and diagrams illustrating relevant anatomical structures included in the health topics.

The site also offers the following features:

- **Kids E.N.T.** A section for parents with information about common pediatric otorhinolaryngic conditions, including everything from tonsillitis and sinusitis to cleft lips and pediatric sleep apnea.
- **Find a doctor:** A searchable database of board-certified otolaryngologists that can be narrowed down by name, location, and area of specialization.
- **Virtual museum:** This virtual photo tour of the John Q. Adams Center for the History of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery’s gems spotlights exhibits such as “The art of otolaryngology and hearing aids through the ages.” One look at pictures of the old surgical instruments will make any otolaryngology patient relieved to see the high-tech offerings of a modern office.
The public site contains many links to the professional site, with items intended for academy members and otolaryngology practitioners. The professional site itself includes continuing education opportunities, conference and workshop listings, best practices, advice about managing a medical practice, outreach opportunities, research updates, grants, a discussion board, and many other current resources for practicing otolaryngologists.

**MedlinePlus: Ear, nose, and throat topics**  

MedlinePlus is the foremost consumer health information site, containing reviewed and frequently updated information pages about more than 740 health topics. MedlinePlus is produced by the National Library of Medicine and available for free at www.medlineplus.gov.

The Ear, Nose, and Throat health topic provides an alphabetical list of approximately 60 related topics and conditions. Clicking the links on the right, or clicking the body part on the diagram, will provide a sublist of topics in that section. Each entry contains lists of quality-controlled links to other Web pages that offer health information, including symptoms, treatments, pharmaceutical information, clinical trials, current news, and the latest professional literature published.

For many topics (e.g., tinnitus), there are interactive health tutorials as well.

This section in MedlinePlus is quite easy to navigate. By default, new windows open when links are clicked, so it’s helpful to keep the home page open as a reference point.

The sources of the information are indicated clearly, and "last updated" dates are easily recognizable. Information is also available in Spanish.

**NIDCD: National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders**  
www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/

The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) is the branch of the National Institutes of Health dedicated to research and treatment of hearing, voice, speech, language, and other senses. The health information section presents general topics in a Q&A format and provides links to the NIDCD clearinghouse, from which free brochures may be ordered, and to a directory of related organizations. Other unique features include:

- **Information for educators and student activities:** Interactive quizzes (“Sound Ruler”), videos (Travel Inside the Ear), classroom guides (How Your Brain Understands What Your Ear Heals), and public health information campaign materials (Healthy Hearing 2010).
- **Statistics:** Notable statistics on hearing, taste, smell, and voice/language in an easy-to-understand, summary format. References for data sources are provided at the bottom of each statistical page.
- **Glossary:** An alphabetical list of frequently used terms in otolaryngology. The definitions require a relatively high literacy level, but the definitions are concise and clear. No linked cross-references are provided.

Other recommended sites:

- Bobby A. Alford Department of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery: www.entnet.org/healthinfo
- Baylor School of Medicine: www.bcm.edu/oto
- OTOHNS Net: http://otohns.net/
- Barnes Jewish Hospital: www.barnesjewish.org/healthinfo/content.asp?PageID=P00465
- Dizziness, Imbalance and Hearing Disorders: www.dizziness-and-balance.com/disorders

Editor’s note: Harris is the reference librarian at Graese Community Health Library at Orlando (FL) Regional Healthcare. Do you have favorite health information sites to share with your colleagues? Contact Managing Editor Maureen Larkin at 781/639-1872, Ext. 3913 or e-mail her at mlarkin@hcpro.com.
HEALTHCARE GUIDE TO THE INTERNET

Focus: Otolaryngology—head and neck surgery resources

by Cynthia Johnson

Otolaryngologists treat a variety of symptoms, such as vestibular disorders, head and neck cancer, tinnitus, and hearing loss. We’ve put together a number of sites that contain content about these conditions, and we’ve also included a few others that contain information about the field as a whole.

If you want to explore a variety of otolaryngology topics, head to the Barnes-Jewish Hospital site (www.barnesjewish.org/healthinfo/content.asp?PageID=P00465). In its Otolaryngology section, the site has a comprehensive topic index where users can learn more about things like tinnitus, hearing aids, acoustic neuroma, and stuttering.

For all things nasal, visit the American Rhinologic Society site (www.american-rhinologic.org). It has content about a number of topics, such as childhood sinusitis, hay fever, nasal polyps, septal surgery, and more. Don’t miss its computer-generated, 3D images of the nose and sinus anatomy.

The Dizziness-and-Balance site (www.dizziness-and-balance.com) is our diamond in the rough this month. What it lacks in style and interface it more than makes up for with information about the topic of dizziness and hearing disorders.

A number of otolaryngology resources are described and reviewed in the following pages, as listed in the index below, using the five-star system to rate each on content, interface, and style.

Index: Otolaryngology resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Rhinologic Society</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Speech-Language-Hearing Association</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Tinnitus Association</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnes-Jewish Hospital: Otolaryngology</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bobby A. Alford Department of Otolaryngology, Baylor College of Medicine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dizziness-and-Balance.com</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Cancer Institute</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neurotology Research Center</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
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<tr>
<td>Otoshns.net</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vestibular Disorders Association</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

American Rhinologic Society
www.american-rhinologic.org

Ratings: Content: ★★★★★ Interface: ★★★★ Style: ★★★★

The American Rhinologic Society (ARS) is a physician organization whose mission focuses on the medical and surgical treatment of patients with diseases of the nose and paranasal sinuses. The society designed its Web site as a portal for patients, physicians, and members.

Users can access the majority of the information on the site by clicking the links at the top of the home page. Patients should click the Patient Information link to access content about a number of topics such as childhood sinusitis, hay fever, loss of senses of taste and smell, nasal polyps, septoplasty and septal surgery, rhinoplasty, and more. Other resources on the site include the ARS newsletter, links to external resources, and quick links to frequently accessed content on the site.

Unique elements: The Patient Information section houses a series of computer-generated 3D images of the nose and sinus anatomy that users can download.

Comments: The ARS invites users to rate articles that they find helpful.
Cost: The majority of the information on the site is free, with some content restricted to members only.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: otolaryngology, nose, nasal cavity, paranasal sinuses, American Rhinologic Society, ARS.

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association

www.asha.org

Ratings: Content: **** Interface: **** Style: ***

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is a professional, scientific, and credentialing association for audiologists, speech-language pathologists, and speech, language, and hearing scientists. ASHA promotes the interests of and provides services to these members to advocate for people with communication disabilities.

If you aren’t a member, click on the link titled The Public on the home page. Here is where you will find information about communication and communication disorders, hearing and balance, and speech, language, and swallowing. This section also contains information about health insurance, advocacy, and outreach.

Unique elements: The site has a Students section that lets those interested explore the professions in the field, learn about academic programs, financial aid, and more.

Comments: The site contains a “Find a Professional” tool.

Cost: The majority of the information on the site is free with the exception of the content within the “ASHA & NSSLHA Members” link.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: otolaryngology, ear, hearing, speech, language, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, ASHA.

American Tinnitus Association

www.ata.org

Ratings: Content: **** Interface: **** Style: ****

Founded in 1971, the American Tinnitus Association (ATA) is a nonprofit organization working to cure tinnitus through the development of resources that advance research. Tinnitus is the perception of ringing, buzzing, roaring, or other noises in the ears or head when there is no external source of noise.

To access information about this condition, click on the About Tinnitus link on the home page. It contains information for patients to help them learn more about the condition and other hearing disorders, access information about healthcare professionals, and find answers to FAQs.

The site also offers information for professionals so they can learn more about treatment options for patients, order brochures, and reach patients through the ATA listing.

Unique elements: You can experience what it is like to have tinnitus by clicking on the About Tinnitus link and clicking the word “here” to hear a sample of a tinnituslike sound.

Comments: Information on the site is available in Spanish.

Cost: The majority of the content is free, with certain areas in the Members Section restricted to members only. Donate $35 to the organization and you’ll receive a copy of Tinnitus Today, the ATA’s quarterly journal. In addition to the magazine, members also have access to an online library of tinnitus articles and listings of healthcare professionals, self-help groups, and volunteer networks.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: otolaryngology, ear, head, tinnitus, American Tinnitus Association, ATA.
Barnes-Jewish Hospital: Otolaryngology
www.barnesjewish.org/healthinfo/content.asp?PageID=P00465

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: **** Style: *****

To access the otolaryngology content on the Barnes-Jewish Hospital site, click the Medical Specialties menu and select Otolaryngology. From here, you can locate a physician in the department, request an appointment, learn about upcoming classes and events, or peruse some of the otolaryngology content. You'll find the majority of the content located within the Topic Index.

The index contains links to the information contained in the site. By clicking through the links in the index, users can learn more about ear, nose, and throat disorders such as tinnitus, hearing loss, acoustic neuroma, and stuttering. Users can also find information about laryngeal cancer and hearing and speech communication services and devices.

**Unique elements:** The site contains a glossary of otolaryngology terms and facts.

**Comments:** In 2007, Barnes-Jewish Hospital ranked ninth in the nation by U.S. News & World Report. This is the 15th consecutive year that the hospital has been named to the “America’s Best Hospitals” list.

**Cost:** Free.

**RSS XML link:** None.

**Keywords:** otolaryngology, ear, nose, throat, Barnes-Jewish Hospital.

Bobby A. Alford Department of Otolaryngology,
Baylor College of Medicine
www.bcm.edu/oto

Ratings: Content: **** Interface: *** Style: **

Baylor College of Medicine in Houston has a Patient Education Center that contains information and answers to patient questions about topics in otolaryngology and head and neck surgery. Some of the links on the site lead to information from the college, whereas others lead to educational resources on the Internet.

The Topics from Our Department section contains information about topics such as acoustic neuroma and skull-base surgery, cochlear implants, Eustachian tube dysfunction, and vestibular rehabilitation.

**Unique elements:** The Other Valuable Educational Resources on the Internet section contains links to information about topics such as allergy, asthma, and rhinitis, head and neck cancer, pediatric otolaryngology, and congenital and hereditary hearing disorders.

**Comments:** The pages contain illustrations that help explain the textual content, which is well written and quite impressive.

**Cost:** Free.

**RSS XML link:** None.

**Keywords:** otolaryngology, ear, nose, throat, head and neck surgery Baylor College of Medicine.

Dizziness-and-Balance.com
www.dizziness-and-balance.com

Ratings: Content: **** Interface: ** Style: **

Chicago Dizziness and Hearing (CDH) is an otoneurol-ogy medical private practice affiliated with Northwestern University in Evanston, IL. CDH specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of dizziness and hearing disorders. The practice maintains the Dizziness-and-Balance.com Web site, which contains information aimed at patients with dizziness and hearing disorders.

To access patient information, click on the Educational Information link. It contains an overview of dizziness, dizziness or vertigo caused by inner ear problems, neurological problems, low blood pressure, hearing problems, and situational or symptom dizziness. You’ll also find information about the treatment of vertigo and testing for hearing and
balance problems in this section. Some of the content has been translated into Spanish and Korean.

**Unique elements:** Click the Practice Support Materials link on the home page to access information aimed at practitioners interested in dizziness and imbalance, such as lecture handouts, testing, and eye movement recording devices.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dizziness-and-Balance.com</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information about dizziness, balance, and hearing from Chicago Dizziness and Hearing</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Search | Read first page 10  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dr. Hain and Chicago Dizziness and Hearing</th>
<th>Educational Information (particularly for patients)</th>
<th>Practice support materials (particularly for clinicians)</th>
<th>Cultural expressions related to dizziness or hearing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Comments: This site is a diamond in the rough (lots and lots of links), but the search tool makes it easier to find what you are looking for.

Cost: Free. Users can purchase items, such as DVDs on topics such as *Understanding Your Dizziness and Balance Disorder*, through the site.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: otolaryngology, ear, vestibular disorders, inner ear disorders, dizziness, balance, hearing, Dizziness-and-Balance.com, Chicago Dizziness and Hearing, Thomas C. Hain, MD.

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**National Cancer Institute**


**Ratings:** Content: ***** Interface: **** Style: *****

The National Cancer Institute is a component of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). It is the federal government’s principal agency for cancer research and training.

To navigate to the head and neck cancer content, go to the home page and click All Cancer Topics, then select Head and Neck Cancer.

Once at the Head and Neck Cancer section of the site, you can begin your education by reading a definition of cancer that arises in the head or neck region. The overview also includes a section called Head and Neck Cancer Questions and Answers.

What’s great about the content on the site is that it is geared toward both patients and healthcare professionals. For example, the Treatment section contains two links per topic, one for patients and one for health professionals. The Treatment section contains information about treatment options, such as chemotherapy and radiation.

Other content on the site includes information about:

- Prevention, genetics, and risk factors
- Methods of cancer detection, such as new imaging technologies, tumor markers, and biopsy procedures
- Clinical trials and trial-related data
- Cancer literature
- Research, funding opportunities, and special reports
- Cancer incidence, mortality, and survival statistics

**Unique elements:** Users can read an online booklet, *What You Need to Know About Cancer of the Larynx*. It contains information about laryngeal cancer symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, and questions patients should ask healthcare professionals.

Comments: The site is available in Spanish.

Cost: Free.

RSS XML link: None.
Keywords: otolaryngology, head, neck, cancer, laryngeal cancer, US National Institutes of Health, NIH, National Cancer Institute, NCI.

Neurotology Research Center
www.earsite.com
Ratings: Content: *** Interface: *** Style: ***

With offices in Bethesda, MD, and Fairfax, VA, the Neurotology Research Center disseminates information to patients to help them understand the disease process. Earsite.com touts itself as “one of the most complete ear and brain research sites on the Web."

Dr. Sanjay Prasad, a certified otolaryngologist at the practice, has published numerous books and chapters within the field of neurotology and skull-base surgery. He is a clinical professor at both Georgetown University and George Washington University Hospital School of Medicine and Health Sciences.

From the home page, users can access content about tumors, ear infections, dizziness, hearing loss/ringing, hearing aids and devices, facial paralysis, injury/trauma, and cranial-base surgery.

These menu items, when clicked, display a submenu with a variety of content options along the right-hand side of the page.

Unique elements: The site contains brief and basic information palatable for patients interested in learning more about otolaryngology topics.

Comments: The site contains articles, images, and an online glossary of terms dedicated to the subject matter.

Cost: Free.
RSS XML Link: None.
Keywords: otolaryngology, ear research, brain research, neurotology, Neurotology Research Center, NRC.

Otohns.net
www.otohns.net
Ratings: Content: **** Interface: *** Style: ***

Dr. Ron Kuppersmith founded Otohns.net in 1995 as an e-mail listserv. It became a Web site in 1997. The site allows information exchange and interaction for otolaryngology—head and neck surgery professionals worldwide. The site contains articles, forums, a calendar, meeting information, and news.

Some of the key features of this site include:
» Clinical resources on topics such as laryngology, practice management, rhinology, and head and neck oncology
» Otolaryngology and pediatric otolaryngology forums (physicians only/registration required)
» A library that contains a bookstore, an image library, and University of Texas Medical Branch Department of Otolaryngology grand rounds topics
» Patient education about topics such as rhinology, facial plastics and reconstruction surgery, and snoring and sleep apnea
» A jobs board
» A vendor database
» Links to external resources

Unique elements: Physicians can build a Web page using the site.

Comments: The site contains content for consumers and professionals.

Cost: Free. Some areas, such as the forums, require registration.
RSS XML link: None.
Keywords: otolaryngology, head, neck, otohns.net.

**Vestibular Disorders Association**
www.vestibular.org

**Ratings:** Content: **** Interface: *** Style: ****

The Vestibular Disorders Association (VEDA) is a nonprofit organization that provides information, resources, support, and advocacy to patients suffering from vestibular (inner ear) disorders and to their healthcare providers. VEDA’s mission is “to serve people with vestibular disorders by providing access to information, offering a support network, and elevating awareness of the challenges associated with these disorders.”

The majority of the health content on the site is located within the Vestibular Disorders tab. The navigation is a bit clunky. You’ll have to click on the tab, select a topic, and then select a subtopic to get to information. But the content is worth the effort. Some of the topics within the Vestibular Disorders tab include balance, dizziness, symptoms, tests, treatment, research, statistics, and more. By selecting the Specific Disorders topic, you can access a long list of subtopics, such as Meniere’s disease, acoustic neuroma, vestibular migraine, vestibular hyperacusis, and more.

Other resources on the site include a tool that helps users find a health professional, support groups, and publications.

**Unique elements:** The For Health Professionals tab contains information for members about conferences, training opportunities, and the membership list. This section also includes information about how to obtain patient education handouts.

**Comments:** The site contains a glossary of vestibular disorder terminology.

**Cost:** The majority of the information on the site is free, with certain areas restricted to members only. To purchase a membership, visit the site’s online store. It also contains books, DVDs, videos, and more.

RSS XML link: None.
Keywords: otolaryngology, ear, vestibular disorders, inner ear disorders, Vestibular Disorders Association, VEDA.
KidsHealth

www.kidshealth.org

by Cynthia Johnson

KidsHealth, a health portal providing doctor-approved health information about children, contains a great deal of information about how both of our site review topics this month affect kids.

The Nemours Foundation’s Center for Children’s Health Media created this site in 1995 to provide families with “accurate, up-to-date, and jargon-free health information they can use.”

Jacksonville, FL–based Nemours (www.nemours.org) also supports the operation of a number of children’s health facilities, such as the Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children in Wilmington, DE, and the Nemours Children’s Clinics throughout Florida.

The KidsHealth site presents users with three site options: Parents Site, Kids Site, and Teens Site. Each contains information written specifically for the given audience and tailored to the audience’s specific needs.

The Parents Site contains parenting information and news. The Kids Site contains homework help and information about how the body works. The Teens Site contains answers, advice, and “straight talk.”

For the purposes of this site review, we entered terms such as “otitis media” and “food allergies” into the site’s search box and mined through the results. Each search result is accompanied by an icon that lets users know whether the information is aimed at parents, kids, or teens.

Of course, you could use the individual sites and navigate to the information from the various menus, as well. The Medical Problems menu on the parents site is likely where you would find the most information about otolaryngology or allergies and asthma.

Each topic page has three tabs on the right-hand side that let users read the main article, access related articles, and view links to additional resources.

The articles contain links to other content within the site, which can be quite helpful if you are reading about otitis media and want to learn more about things like ear tube surgery or hearing difficulties, for example.

Key in the search term “asthma” to bring up the site’s Asthma Center. As with all topics on the site, you can choose the site for parents, kids, or teens. More than just an article on a given topic, it contains links to articles, news, and tools.

The centers contain basic information, helpful advice about managing asthma, news articles, and tools such as an asthma diary, asthma movie, and sound clip of the sounds of asthma.

You can access another impressive feature on the site by clicking the What Do I Do? link on the Parents site home page. It contains first-aid printouts about a number of topics.

One could envision a pediatrician handing the printouts to patients or encouraging parents to go to the site and access the documents themselves. There are printouts about allergic reactions, CPR, and knowing your child’s medical history.

The information on this site is also available in Spanish. Users can print and e-mail articles using handy site tools.