

# SURFING THE NET ... FOR HEALTH!



There are hundreds of websites on almost any given health or medical topic. The Internet educates both doctors and the public and can be a powerful force for improving people's health. As a form of communication, the Internet has accomplished much and has enormous potential for good. Yet setting up a website is both easy and cheap ... anybody can sell or claim anything. How can we judge the validity of the information being offered, or the credentials of the "experts"?

Since there is no peer review to guarantee what you are reading is accurate or up-to-date, it is important to be a cautious consumer of on-line information. The Health Department offers the following tips when seeking medical and health information on the Internet:

- ❖ If you have been diagnosed with an illness and want more information, the Internet is a good place to start. Discuss your findings with your health care provider by using it as a basis for questions. Use a standard reference book to confirm the information.
- ❖ Some doctors offer on-line consultations, though it is difficult to know if their credentials are genuine. While they may be useful as an additional source of information, only accept a diagnosis from a doctor who has seen you personally and has access to your medical records.
- ❖ Avoid any site where only one point of view is given.
- ❖ Mistrust any site that sells products, especially a product that claims to have a 100% cure rate, or can cure everything.
- ❖ Having prescriptions filled on-line can be economical and convenient, but don't assume you are getting bargain prices (some sites actually charge more than real drugstores). Only purchase medication prescribed by your own physician, never from a cyber-pharmacist who may prescribe potentially dangerous drugs without ever seeing the patient.
- ❖ Ignore cyber-salesmen who claim that the government, medical profession and mainstream scientific research are working together to suppress *their* products ... or that doctors don't really want to cure cancer, heart disease, the common cold, etc.
- ❖ Be suspicious of claims of "secret ingredient", "breakthrough", "miracle cure" or "ancient remedy". Mysterious charts, testimonials and scientific words like "ionic" or "antioxidant" may, or may not, mean anything.
- ❖ Look for resources from:
  - ✓ United States government agencies and state/local government agencies offering information services beyond their geographic boundaries
  - ✓ News web sites
  - ✓ National voluntary, non-profit and professional organizations serving the public interest
  - ✓ Other organizations partnering with government agencies to provide information to the general public
  - ✓ Universities, other educational institutions and libraries

