



BOOKMARKS: Coronary heart disease and the Internet – health promotion, prevention, and dissemination

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Web sites covering coronary heart disease information for both the public and the health professional.

Coronary heart disease (CHD) is one of the major problems of our society. This edition of bookmarks looks at some of the resources that are available to the practitioner and the public on the Internet.

Using the simple term 'heart disease', a Google search returned a huge amount of hits 100,000+, Alta Vista slightly less, and OMNI <<http://omni.ac.uk>> 94. OMNI, of course, is slightly different in that the information has been catalogued and evaluated according to set criteria. This article will explore UK based sites.

Information for the public

For the public, three organisations suggest themselves: the British Heart Foundation (BHF) <<http://www.bhf.org.uk>>, the BBC <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/heart/>> and NHS Direct Online within their new encyclopaedia <<http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/nhsdoheso/display.asp?Topic=Heartattack>>. The BHF site offers a wide range of information on CHD, treatment, and research. It also carries a search-and-order facility for many of the publications produced by the charity. The BBC site has a number of different sections and offers the viewer a text-only version of the information, something that the NHS Direct and the BHF site don't appear to supply. The NHS Direct site offers a basic guide to the causes, symptoms and treatment of heart attack. Surprisingly, CHD is not listed under the 'topics in depth' section on the NHS Direct homepage.

Information for the professional

Turning to information for the professional, the BHF site has a section dedicated to information for

professionals that gives useful links not only to the organisation's monthly factfiles series, online copies of which can be obtained for 2001 and 2002, but also to current CHD statistics <<http://www.dphpc.ox.ac.uk/bhfhprg/stats/2000/index.html>> in the form of Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. The links section was a little disappointing, as it only seemed to list research organisations and not other professionals or operative units. Another significant central, national site for CHD is the National Service Framework for Coronary Heart Disease <<http://www.doh.gov.uk/nsf/coronary.htm>> published by the Department of Health in 2000. As well as presenting the framework and associated documents in html, it also offers the facility to download them as PDF files. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) <<http://www.nice.org.uk>> offers information for the professional and the public on developments within CHD in the UK. These developments can be related to technology appraisals, clinical guidelines or audits of clinical work. The NICE site is quite easy to navigate and has a useful search tool. It also offers a text-only version for the visually impaired. The NICE clinical audit projects are still in motion.

Cardiothoracic centres

Are performance figures from individual cardiothoracic centres available on the Internet?

The links sections of Web areas such as the BHF don't appear to list links to any of the major cardiothoracic centres, so searching for these had to be done either through search engines or the browseable list on the NHS site <<http://www.nhs.uk>>. This list revealed the cardiothoracic

centre at Liverpool <<http://www.ctc.nhs.uk/>>. After a little searching using traditional search engines, the Web site of the South Manchester University Hospitals Trust was found <<http://www.smuht.man.ac.uk/cts/>>. Interestingly, this site appears to be hosted at Manchester University, not at an NHS server. Both sites are designed using frames, with Liverpool using the more familiar NHS symbols and branding. What both sites have in common is a mission to disseminate results, waiting time statistics, and information about the medical staff of each unit. It would appear that this approach is part of the major and continuing audit that is being carried out within the Northwest region. Both sites seek to explain how the performance figures have been arrived at using a variety of diagrams and 'relatively' uncomplicated language. However, apart from these subject areas, the sites contain little other information, although it appears that the Liverpool site will contain patient information at some point in the future.

The NICE site offers a text-only version for the visually impaired

It is impossible within the brief space of this article to review and mention the huge range of sites that contain information on CHD. It is interesting to note that it would appear that the Internet is now becoming an accepted tool by health workers, for communicating directly with patients/public and with other professionals. It is also heartening to note that the complexity of the information presented is beginning to grow, an example of this is the discussion concerning performance figures that has been presented by the two cardiothoracic centres.