



# Ask Your Pharmacist

## Playing It Safe With Online Health Care Tools

by Lisa Chavis

(NAPSA)—There's no doubt that the Internet has become an important health resource. In fact, according to Verispan's Pharmaceutical Company Image 2006 report, 79 percent of physicians encourage their patients to use the Web for medical information.



**Lisa Chavis**

The best places to look for reliable information are government Web sites and those of reputable institutes and organizations, as well as online information provided by your medical

and prescription insurer. Some examples include:

- Government Web sites: The Food and Drug Administration ([www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)) regulates all prescription and over-the-counter medications. For information on alternative medicine and treatments, visit the site of the National Institutes of Health's National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (<http://nccam.nih.gov>).

- Medical institutions and organizations, such as [www.MayoClinic.com](http://www.MayoClinic.com) and the World Health Organization at [www.who.org](http://www.who.org).

There are also sites that allow you to comparison shop to help lower your prescription drug costs, including Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs—[www.CRbestbuydrugs.org](http://www.CRbestbuydrugs.org)—which identifies safe, effective and affordable medications for various health conditions and diseases.

- Insurance-specific comparison tools: If you are insured, out-of-pocket prescription drug costs will depend on your specific coverage. A site such as [Medco.com](http://Medco.com)'s



**Medical Web sites can provide useful information, but it's important to know where to look.**

Savings Advisor offers cost comparisons based on an individual's drug plan, providing users medication choices starting with the lowest-cost alternative.

According to the Verispan report, 19 percent of consumers have ordered prescription products online. Online pharmacies can be less expensive, but some precautions need to be taken:

- Look for the VIPPS (Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites) seal. These sites have successfully completed a review and inspection by the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy.

- Only purchase prescription drugs from Web sites that require a prescription from your doctor.

- Check your health plan to see if your Pharmacy Benefit Manager offers an online pharmacy service.

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