



Health Awareness

Surfing The Internet May Be Good For Your Health

(NAPSA)—Think of a doctor's prescription and you probably think "pills"!

But under a new program of the American College of Physicians Foundation (ACPF) and the National Library of Medicine (NLM) that prescription may be for a trustworthy Web site of free medical information.

ACP's 119,000 internist members will be encouraged to "prescribe" information for their patients from MedlinePlus (www.medlineplus.gov) using a special "prescription pad" during office visits.

"Physicians have always known that an informed patient who takes an active role is a 'better' patient," noted NLM Director Donald A.B. Lindberg, M.D. "We believe that both patients and their doctors will welcome this additional medical tool—good medical information—in their continuing efforts to provide good health care."

Traditionally, physicians have supplemented discussion of a diagnosis or condition in the office with brochures that are rarely tailored to each patient's special needs. Today, the majority of U.S. adults online—an estimated 80 percent—use the Internet to find health information, and most say it helps them get better health care, according to a study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project.

"Part of an internist's job is to explain illnesses and diagnoses to



A new program encourages internists to direct patients to a Web site for medical information.

their patients," said Ruth Parker, M.D., FACP, chair of the ACP Foundation's Programs Committee and Professor of Medicine at Emory University School of Medicine. "NLM's MedlinePlus provides authoritative, user-friendly and commercial-free information that doctors can use to supplement information provided in the office or clinic."

MedlinePlus has information on more than 700 diseases and conditions, and links to preformulated searches of the Medline database to allow viewers to find references to the latest professional articles on health topics. Much of this information is from the National Institutes of Health.

Under each topic, patients will find information on symptoms, diagnosis and treatment, current news stories, research studies, clinical trials, helpful graphics and interactive tutorials. MedlinePlus accepts no advertising and

most information is available in Spanish.

The joint project has been tested by more than 500 ACP internists and their patients. Internists who participated in the pilot programs said that MedlinePlus empowers patients, explains difficult concepts and procedures, and improves patient-physician communication.

The ACPF and NLM program provides participating internists with a poster, bookmarks and a supply of prescription pads on which the physician can write in a disease or condition and advise patients how to look up the information on MedlinePlus. The NLM's National Network of Libraries of Medicine will help patients who have questions about access to MedlinePlus. Any interested physician may participate in the Information Rx project by placing an order for materials at www.informationrx.org.

The ACP Foundation supports the mission of the American College of Physicians to improve the health of the public through education, research, service, and professionalism. It works with other health organizations, the public and corporations.

The National Library of Medicine is part of the National Institutes of Health, an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is the nation's largest medical library.