

Answers to the Health Questions People Ask in Libraries:

A MEDICAL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION GUIDE

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Foreword

Dear Health Care Consumer:

As a physician, a large part of my practice consists of educating people and their families regarding various topics in medicine, including medical conditions, available treatments, and prevention of illness. These days, individuals are strongly encouraged to play an active role in their own health care in both educating themselves and participating with health care providers to make informed decisions regarding their care. I believe that this philosophy is extremely important. In my experience, patients who have the best understanding of their situation are typically the ones who fare the best—physically, emotionally, and psychologically.

The largest problem that health care consumers face is finding reliable sources of information. Consumers are bombarded with information, whether it be from the Internet, television advertisements, personal testimony, or a variety of other areas. Some of these sources can provide valuable information—however, many provide information that is misleading, inaccurate, or even dangerous. Therefore, it is important not only that a health care consumer be educated but also that the individual be *correctly* educated.

The goal of *Answers to the Health Questions People Ask in Libraries* is to provide an authoritative resource that answers some of the most common questions individuals have regarding health care. Not only will this resource provide direct answers to these questions, but it will also point readers to other reliable sources of information that will take a lot of the “guesswork” out of their research. While nothing can replace a good relationship with one’s health care provider, having a convenient and comprehensive source of information, such as this

book, will likely prove indispensable to the concerned or curious health care consumer.

We sincerely hope that you find this resource useful, informative, and interesting.

With warm regards,

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Preface

Answers to the Health Questions People Ask in Libraries provides authoritative answers to the health questions most frequently asked in libraries, ranging from “How do I find a LASIK surgeon?” to “Does the flu vaccine cause the flu?” The quality of the information librarians provide people directly impacts their lives.

As librarians we typically direct people to credible sources of information in which answers can be found. But it is also our experience that there are frequently asked questions that could be answered in a “one-stop shop” book, saving time while putting reliable information into the hands of the people on both ends of the question-answer exchange. To ensure that all the answers are accurate, the authors have collaborated with a physician, Dr. David L. Townsend, a graduate of the Medical College of Georgia who is an internal medicine physician at Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Dr. Townsend jumped at the chance to help with this project, explaining that there is a great need for a resource written for the general public that offers accurate information about health conditions. “People visit their doctors armed with all sorts of inaccurate health information they have gathered from the Web. We need more reliable health resources to help educate people about health concerns,” he said.

With the team in place, and with the Medical Library Association’s endorsement, the authors created a survey to collect information about common health questions asked in libraries. The survey was loaded onto a Web page, and a link to the online survey was sent to hundreds of libraries across the country using library-related electronic discussion lists (listservs). More than 270 librarians responded to the survey, many of them saying, “Please share the results!” The librarians

who responded worked in public libraries, academic libraries, school libraries, hospital libraries, and special libraries. Nearly all 50 states in the United States were represented. We gathered and analyzed the survey data and include in this book the questions that came up most often.

Answers to the Health Questions People Ask in Libraries is intended for the general public and can be made available in doctor's offices, libraries, hospitals, and health clinics—in fact, anywhere health care consumers often visit. It is written in a simple and casual manner. The entries are easy to read, and important points are highlighted in text boxes that jump out from the page. URLs are included to point readers to important Web sites. The health concerns covered include cancer, AIDs, and diabetes; family health, from childhood to adulthood; nutrition and fitness; drug information; and alternative and complementary medicine.

Chapter 1, “Major Health Concerns,” covers heart health, cancer, diabetes, and HIV/AIDs. The emphasis of this chapter is on prevention and early detection. Routine tests and screenings are described in detail.

Chapter 2, “Family Health,” contains information that is important to family members of all ages. The questions and answers are divided into six categories: women's health and pregnancy, children's health, men's health, senior health, general family health, and vaccinations.

Chapter 3, “Nutrition and Fitness,” provides questions and answers that fall into three categories: nutrition and exercise, vitamins and supplements, and alcohol and stimulants.

Chapter 4, “Complementary and Alternative Medicine,” answers many common questions about medical products and practices that are not part of standard medical care. Topics fall within the following categories: healing systems (e.g., Ayurveda, naturopathy, and homeopathy); mind–body connections (e.g., yoga and meditation), herbal medicine (e.g., echinacea and ginkgo); manipulation and touch (e.g., chiropractic and massage therapy); and energy therapies (e.g., Reiki and acupuncture). The purpose of this chapter is to give readers factual information about these sometimes controversial topics.

Chapter 5, “Drug Information,” discusses both prescription and over-the-counter medicines. Stressed throughout this chapter is the

importance of learning as much as possible about a medicine before taking it.

Chapter 6 is called “Odds and Ends” because it provides information about unusual and misunderstood medical conditions. It also contains information about how technology (e.g., microwaves and cell phones) might affect a person’s health.

Two additional features that will be helpful to readers are a “Glossary of Experts” and an annotated “Resources: Where to Go When You Want to Know about Health Care,” both of which are located at the back of the book. The “Glossary of Experts” provides definitions of the various types of health care providers mentioned in the book. It also provides Web addresses for online directories to help readers locate doctors or other health care providers in their areas. The print and online resources will be helpful to those seeking additional health information.

The authors are confident that this book, which combines the authority of a physician with the clear, casual writing style that the layperson can easily understand, will help health care consumers learn more about health in general as well as about specific medical conditions. Of course, nothing can take the place of a visit to a doctor. But, as a supplement to regular visits to your health care provider, we hope this book proves valuable.

Acknowledgments

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Steve would like to acknowledge his wife, Sarah, for anchoring him in life. He would like to thank his parents, Glenn and Carol Wilson, for bringing him to life. And he would like to re-echo Laura’s sentiment above—he, too, feels lucky to work with such great people, even Laura Kane’s “baby brother.”

David would first like to thank God for His grace and sovereignty. He is also eternally grateful to his wife, Leah, for her tireless love, support, and patience—being the wife of a doctor is no easy task. He would furthermore like to thank his children, Ellison and Ethan, for being constant sources of joy, pride, and cuteness, and for being continual reminders of God’s grace. Lastly, David would like to thank all of the mentors and friends he has made in the course of his career.