Women's Health Matters ASSURED

Assisting ACT women to access health and wellbeing information on the Internet

The internet is a popular and influential source of health and wellbeing information, but it is not always easy to know if the information that you access is credible or trustworthy.

In 2010 Women's Health Matters conducted research with women in the ACT about searching for health and wellbeing information, and women told us that they needed help in identifying what information on the Internet was credible, trustworthy and right for them.

As a result Women's Health Matters developed Women's Health Matters ASSURED to assist women to navigate health and wellbeing information online. It offers a website review process that helps to quickly assess the credibility and trustworthiness of the health and wellbeing information you find online, so that you can make informed health and wellbeing decisions.

Women's Health Matters ASSURED is not a guide to the scientific accuracy of health and wellbeing information provided on the Internet. And it is important that you always consult a health professional rather than using web based information for diagnosis or treatment of health issues.

How to use Women's Health Matters ASSURED

Women's Health Matters ASSURED is designed to be used as a checklist. Each letter of the ASSURED acronym stands for a step in assessing the quality of health and wellbeing information found on the Internet. Each step for you to follow is outlined in detail below.

Not every step in Women's Health Matters ASSURED is going to be necessary for every piece of health and wellbeing information you find online.

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Author and funding bodies:
· Are the author and funding bodies named and are they reputable i.e. are   they government or recognised not-for-profit organisations?
· Are their contact details available?
· Are their objectives for creating the website clear?
· Does the site have a policy for content assessment?
· Does the site state clearly its terms of use?

Seal of approval:
· Has the website been approved by a reputable source i.e. government or recognised not-for-profit organisations?
· Does the website have the HONcode seal of approval? Has the site been peer reviewed and quality assessed by health professionals and experts?

Safe:
· Does the website respect your privacy? For
example, if you are asked to enter personal details, does the website acknowledge how it intends to use these?
· If you are asked to pay a fee to use the website, does it tell you why?

Up-to-date:
· How current is the website? For example, a website published ten years ago is probably not as up-to-date as one published in more recent times.
· When was the site last updated? A good website will provide details about when it was last updated.

Representative:
· Who is the website aimed at, e.g. elderly, children, men or women?
· Is it appropriate and relevant for you?
· Is the site easy to use and understand?

Explains and justifies information about symptoms, causes, prevention and treatment options:
· If the website contains information about specific health issues, are the symptoms, causes and preventative measures it lists based on reputable research and sources?
· If the website contains information about treatment options, are the risks and benefits of each option explained clearly and is this based on reputable research and sources?
· Does the website have a bias for a particular treatment or product, if so, does it explain why?
· Is advertising separate or incorporated into this section?
· Be cautious of sites that push treatments and products that seem 'too good to be true' **(1)**.

Discuss and discern:
· Does the website encourage discussion with relevant health professionals and acknowledge that it should not be a replacement for their advice and treatment?
· Don't be afraid to be a discerning cybersceptic **(2)** and compare the information provided by multiple sites.

(1) World Health Organisation, Medical Products and The Internet: A Guide to Finding Reliable Information, 1999, accessed 19/08/2010 <www.tga.gov.au/DOCS/pdf/whointer.pdf>.
(2) Women's Health Matters Canada, Women Wading Through the Web: A Health Toolkit, Women's College Hospital, Toronto, 2007, p. 21.