Text messaging your way to better health

by Cynthia Johnson

Text messaging—the same technology that American Idol fans use to cast votes for their favorite contestants—is making its way into the American healthcare industry. Several companies hoping to profit from the public’s craving for quick information on the go have products on the market, and many more in development, that allow mobile phone users to receive medication and appointment reminders, manage chronic conditions such as diabetes and asthma, and receive healthy-living advice.

America’s biggest drug problem

When physicians prescribe antibiotics, they tell patients to finish all of their medication to fully recover and avoid building up a drug resistance. But when symptoms subside and patients resume normal activities, they often forget their doctor’s warning—and the few pills remaining in their medicine cabinet. One day goes by, then two, and soon it’s no longer worth taking the rest of the medication. More often than not, patients remain healthy. However, the same cannot be said of patients who are prescribed medications for chronic conditions such as epilepsy or depression, which require that medication be taken according to strict guidelines. If these patients forget to take their medication, they undoubtedly will experience repercussions.

“Noncompliance, in my opinion, is America’s biggest drug problem,” says Kevin Aniskovich, CEO of Intelecare, Inc., of New Haven, CT. “From a public health perspective, we need to ensure that everybody understands the consequences of not being adherent.”

Founded three years ago, Intelecare (www.intelecare.com) offers patients and businesses medical reminder and notification services via e-mail, voice mail, and text message. It has more than 3.2 million customers and sends out more than 5 million reminders every day, with e-mail being the most popular method, followed by text messaging and voice mail.

Intelecare is focusing its development efforts on the issue of increasing medication adherence—a lofty goal given that one out of every two patients is noncompliant. This noncompliance equates to $177 billion in lost or unrealized
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revenue. It also results in $47 billion in hospitalizations every year.

Victor Imbimbo, CEO of Caring Today (www.caringtoday.com), a Fairfield, CT–based magazine that focuses on providing resources and information to family caregivers, says that sometimes the more habitually we take medication, the easier it can be to forget to take it. If a patient doesn’t take a medication at a certain time of day, by the time he or she leaves the house or office, the patient often forgets about it.

“Then what do you do? Do you double up [when you miss a dose]?” asks Imbimbo. “Well, some meds you aren’t supposed to double up.”

Many treatment plans require that patients take medication strictly as prescribed. If patients deviate from their treatment plan even the slightest bit, they can set back their progress to such a point that they may never be able to regain it.

Imbimbo predicts that the demand for medication reminder tools will grow.

“People aren’t going to take fewer drugs over time; they’re going to be taking more,” he says. “Drugs are becoming so much more specific to the ailment an individual has. I believe over time, you have to deal with a lot more of the medication management issues.”

Taking the burden off caregivers

According to Imbimbo, 25% of all households have a caregiver, and the number continues to grow—he says that it is projected to increase to another 10 million over the next 15 years. Caregiver needs also amount to an estimated $30 billion in lost productivity in the United States each year.

Often, the average caregiver is a member of the “sandwich generation,” someone who is attending to their health as well as that of their aging parents and their own children.

Caring Today introduced Intelecare’s tool to help put control back into the hands of caregivers, who, on average, are 46 years of age and Web-familiar, but not Web-savvy, Imbimbo says. The feedback he has received indicates that the tool has been helpful and that users are having an easy time working with it.

“A caregiver has so many things to think about,” Imbimbo says. “The time constraints and stress really take a toll.”

Caring Today research has shown that caregivers’ No. 1 concern is medication management, especially because the average person receiving care takes four and a half drugs. Caregivers must think beyond medication compliance and consider side effects and interactions. “A lot of other things they could learn by trial and error if they can’t find resources, but with medication, they’re out of their league,” he says. “Many times, they can’t think of everything, so knowing that they’re going to get that message every day relieves them of having to worry about remembering things specific to a medication.”

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Of all the messages that Intelecare users create, Aniskovich says the company sends more reminders for cholesterol-lowering and blood-pressure-controlling medications than for any other drug. A high concentration of users also have reminders to take Allegra for allergies, Advair for asthma, and Actose for diabetes.

Imbimbo says chronic diseases such as Alzheimer’s disease, depression, and epilepsy are important from both the patient and caregiver perspectives. He says that when a patient starts taking upwards of five drugs per day, it becomes easy to miss one of them. The service lets patients prioritize what they should be paying attention to the most, Imbimbo says. The product can also be used for short-term illnesses that aren’t typically part of a patient’s normal prescription routine, such as medications for blood disorders.

“They’re not going to use it as much for colds, but they’re going to use it when it’s something that really affects their long-term well-being,” he says.

Texting your way to disease management

It’s not easy for people living with chronic conditions like asthma and diabetes to adhere to a regimen when it comes to their treatment plan. Perhaps for a few weeks after seeing their doctor, they will. But, as time passes, they stray, typically finding it too difficult to make behavioral changes.

To help these patients, BeWell Mobile Technology (www.bewellmobile.com) of San Francisco has created “patient engagement” software that uses mobile phones. Its product collects patient data so healthcare providers can track a patient’s progress and determine whether personal intervention is required. The service also provides patients with information about their progress and makes suggestions about what they could be doing differently to improve their health status.

Rather than present physicians with peak-flow meter readings and glucose levels alone, BeWell provides them with a variety of information based on how their patients have responded to personalized questions posed to them via their mobile phone.

“It’s not just one data point coming in and one static message going out,” says Peter Boland, MD, BeWell’s business development director.

For example, diabetic patients answer questions related to their insulin usage, meal intake, and level of activity, among others. Physicians can look at reports that will let them know which patients need their immediate attention based on their risk profiles.

“What we want to do is focus high-cost, high-expert clinic time on those folks [who] really need the time and attention,” says Boland. “All this lays the groundwork [for] actual changes in behavior.”

In 2007, 50 Kaiser Permanente diabetic patients who receive care at Riverside (CA) Medical Center participated in a 12-month project using BeWell. Before the project, HbA1c (a diabetic control index) levels ranged 9%–12%; anything over 7% is considered high risk.

“Everybody came down at least 2.22%, which is unheard of,” says Boland. He describes the finding as very significant.

BeWell has also proven effective for severe and persistent asthma sufferers. San Mateo (CA) Medical Center conducted an asthma management project with BeWell involving 50 patients aged 12–19. Before the project, the patients averaged between three and five visits to the emergency room per year. After the project, none of the patients in the study made any emergency room visits.

“BeWell is trying to present a much fuller picture for clinicians to better manage the patient,” says Boland. “We’re trying to collect a whole series of data on what the patient’s condition and symptoms are by the day, hour, and minute.”

An appointment reminder for the 21st century

Branford (CT) Dental Care is a 40-year-old practice with approximately 3,200 active patients. Before using Intelecare, the practice relied on computer-generated phone calls and postcards to remind patients about upcoming appointments. It began actively using the service one year ago when it experienced an increase in missed appointments and last-minute cancellations, which hovered at 50%.

“That not only affects the practice’s bottom line, but also places the patient’s health in possible jeopardy because there is no guarantee when they will reschedule, increasing the risk for cavities, root canals, and more,” says Ryan Finnegan, DMD.

The practice fully integrated the Intelecare service directly into its Web site (www.branforddentalkare.com), and it is seeing a steady adoption of patients using it.

Finnegan says it has consistently increased compliance by reducing missed appointments. The reminders have also cut...
back on administrative staff workload and costs, as the practice doesn’t need to send reminder cards or buy postage.

“Everyone is different, and sometimes our postcards and phone calls did not have the impact which we had hoped,” says Finnegan. “Their system allows our patients to decide when and how they want to be reminded for their upcoming appointment.”

Customized convenience

Intelecare users sign up for the service after finding the company on the Internet or through the relationships that it cultivates with employers, insurers, pharmacies, and pharmaceutical companies. For the latter, Intelecare offers businesses the opportunity to rebrand their platform and integrate it on their own Web sites.

Intelecare’s basic plan offers users free, unlimited e-mail reminders. Its plus plan offers an unlimited number of e-mail, voice mail, and text-messaging reminders for $5 per month—with no commitments or contracts.

After users register with the site, they are given a user account and home page where they can list all their medications and edit, delete, and add new medications. From there, users specify which type of reminder they want to create. The service allows them to receive reminders about taking medication, refilling prescriptions, making doctors appointments, or monitoring health indicators, such as glucose levels. Imbimbo is impressed with how the service allows users to create personalized notifications specific to their medication. “You’re getting your own message; you don’t feel someone’s intruding on you,” he says.

Next, users answer several questions about how they’d like to be reminded, such as the time of day, frequency, and method—e-mail, text, or voice mail. Users can choose one, two, or all three platforms.

For voice mail reminders, the company uses a program that converts a user’s typed message into speech. Imbimbo describes it as a great feature for caregivers who want to ensure that the people for whom they care take their medications.

“The hurdle to try the product is so minimal, and the benefits are so high,” says Imbimbo of the service. “It’s easy to like.” Patients are allowed to print their information to share it with healthcare professionals, but the product currently doesn’t allow for two-way communication due to privacy concerns.

Privacy concerns

Text-message privacy concerns recently made national headlines when the Detroit Free Press examined more than 14,000 text messages between Detroit’s Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick and his chief of staff, Christine Beatty. The messages, exchanged over a city-issued pager, confirmed the two were having an affair, which Kilpatrick had previously lied about under oath.

On many occasions, prosecutors have been able to receive the complete contents of a defendant’s text messages. Judges in the Kobe Bryant case and a trial involving the attempted murder of rapper 50 Cent seized archived text messages.

It stands to reason that if you are ever on trial or are in the public eye, you may not want a text-message reminder to take, say, medication for bipolar disorder to be entered as evidence. It’s worth investigating ahead of time to find out what is your provider’s policy.

Standard text-messaging rates may not apply anymore

In Europe, Aniskovich says that text messaging is more popular than e-mail communication. His company is also closely watching trends in Asian countries where people are using their mobile phones to make purchases.

“We’re a little bit behind the times, but we are seeing a rapid uptake in mobile technologies,” he says.

Although the United States has not fully embraced mobile technology, especially when it comes to text messaging, that may soon change. Earlier this year, all four major wireless providers in the United States (AT&T, Verizon, T-Mobile, and Sprint) introduced new flat-rate plans for customers who used to buy by the minute or message.

“As we become more comfortable with our mobile devices and the [Short Message Service] features become more standard in our plans, there will be fewer barriers to utilization,” says Finnegan. “More and more companies are developing ways to use mobile messaging, so it will at some point become second nature.” According to CTIA – The Wireless Association (www.ctia.org), as of June 2007, 81% of the U.S. population had wireless phones. These figures are only expected to increase, making it very likely that there will be additional healthcare applications for mobile technology in the future.

“It’s like having the doctor in your pocket,” says Boland. H
Nashville-area hospitals’ data exchange may save money, lives
A collaboration among four Nashville-based hospitals or hospital systems calls for the exchange of health information. According to The Tennessean, the agreement between Saint Thomas and Baptist Hospitals, Metro Nashville General Hospital, Vanderbilt University Medical Center, and HCA, Inc.’s, TriStar Health System has the potential to eliminate redundant tests. But before information can be shared, representatives of the hospitals need to decide on the types of data to exchange and issues such as regulatory compliance, connectivity, and privacy.

Milwaukee County database to fight painkiller abuse
The Medical Society of Milwaukee County is developing a database that will allow doctors to check whether their patients have obtained prescriptions for potentially addictive painkillers from any other caregivers. According to the Milwaukee Journal–Sentinel, the medical society ultimately wants to bring pharmacies on board to flag doctors who prescribe large amounts of such drugs.

Technology helps patients recover after intensive care
After heart patients leave intensive care, about 25% of them will become unstable again in the step-down unit, putting pressure on the nurses there to keep patients from deteriorating. According to an article in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, a new technology may help nurses identify much earlier which patients are vulnerable to reversals. The system, made by Carmel, IN–based OBS Medical, automatically monitors vital signs and issues an alert when a patient’s heart rate or breathing starts to get out of control.

Cerner teams up to make high-tech hospital beds
Cerner Corp. of Kansas City, MO, is partnering with manufacturer Hillenbrand Industries of Batesville, IN, to feed data collected by “intelligent bed systems” into Cerner’s medical records system, according to an article in the Kansas City Star. Data, including a patient’s weight, bed-rail position, and head elevation, collected by beds manufactured by Hillenbrand subsidiary Hill-Rom will be fed into Cerner’s software applications. Other data will be collected and included—for example, beds will be allowed to communicate with Cerner software when a patient calls for a nurse, and the incident will be recorded. The partnership will increase interoperability among medical devices and software used to monitor a patient’s progress and, as a result improve care, said Hill-Rom representatives.

Google unveils personal medical record service
Google officially unveiled its foray into medical records when CEO Eric Schmidt introduced Google Health during a February healthcare conference in Florida. According to Reuters, Google representatives said the company has signed deals with hospitals and companies, including medical tester Quest Diagnostics, Inc., health insurer Aetna, Inc., Walgreens, and Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., pharmacies. The Web service is password protected, stores health records on Google computers, and includes a medical services directory that lets users import doctors’ records, drug history, and test results.

Google will begin storing the medical records of a few thousand people as it tests the long-awaited health service. According to the Associated Press, the pilot project will involve 1,500–10,000 patients at the Cleveland Clinic who volunteered to an electronic transfer of their personal health records so the records can be retrieved through Google Health. The password that protects an individual’s health profile is also required to use other Google services, such as Gmail and personalized search tools.
Physician testing relaxation program in virtual world

A Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) neurologist, Daniel Hoch, MD, wants to learn whether therapy administered in Second Life, a virtual world, can have benefits in the real world. According to The Boston Globe, an instructor from MGH in Boston will lead 20–40 Second Life recruits through guided meditations designed to reduce their stress levels. The meditation technique is the one introduced by Dr. Herbert Benson in his 1970s self-help book The Relaxation Response.

New York City to help doctors track patients’ records electronically

New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg has announced that the city is ready to equip doctors with computer software that can track patients’ medical records to provide better preventive care, according to The New York Times.

The new system would let doctors do much more than is possible with paper charts, integrating a patient’s medical history, lab results, and current medications into one electronic interface. The system will also provide up-to-date information to doctors through a series of alerts, as well as share data with other doctors and provide information about the current best practices for treating illnesses.

Network lets Tennessee doctors share patient information

AT&T, Inc., is partnering with Tennessee to provide a statewide system to exchange patient medical information electronically.

The system is designed to transmit detailed patient information between medical professionals and will allow doctors to access medical histories, prescribe medicine over the Internet, and transfer images, according to The Tennessean. Doctors can also use the system to remotely evaluate patients in rural areas who have less access to medical care. The system will also link to the state Department of Health for access to the immunization and disease registry, death certificate processing, and medical license renewals.

Exchanging information electronically may become model

Two small, rural hospitals in southern Illinois—Washington County Hospital in Nashville and Salem Township Hospital—are creating a communitywide medical information exchange that will allow physicians, hospitals, and other medical providers to share patient information electronically.

According to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the partnership establishes a network of health communication that many larger, more-urban areas, including St. Louis, have failed to do.

High costs, efficiency drive online prescribing push

Motivated by mounting medical costs, lawmakers and executives are urging doctors to embrace prescribing medications online, according to the Associated Press. The move could save billions of dollars per year, and proponents say electronic prescriptions will make transactions more efficient, reduce medication errors, and entice doctors to prescribe less expensive drugs. 
Health data storage sites might not be secure

The World Privacy Forum is warning consumers about the potential pitfalls of using newly popular services that consolidate personal health records. According to the San Francisco Chronicle, some of the records are kept by companies that are not subject to current federal regulations on privacy and security.

Healthcare reform must include IT issues, group says

Congress needs to pass healthcare IT legislation before private companies develop multiple systems that don’t talk to each other, according to members of the Health IT Now! Coalition and the Information Technology Industry Council. The groups urged Congress to move ahead with health IT legislation such as the Promoting Health Information Technology Act, which would establish a public/private group to recommend health IT standards and certification and would budget $163 million per year for healthcare providers to adopt health IT products, according to PC World.

E-mails improve patient-surgeon communication

A new report says that providing patients with e-mail access to their surgeon appears to improve communication, according to a HealthDay article. “Despite the many concerns, we believe this study shows that the provision to patients of readily available e-mail access to their surgeon provides a very effective means of improving communication prior to patients undergoing elective surgery,” says the study, which appeared in the February Archives of Surgery.

Study of medical information online urges skepticism

A study by researchers at the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston and the University of Texas has found that breast cancer information was inaccurate or misleading on 5% of 343 Web sites examined. According to The Philadelphia Inquirer, sites that focused on alternative or complementary medical approaches were 15 times more likely to contain problematic information.

Audit software provides hospitals with warning

In response to concerns about patient information security and privacy, hospitals are increasingly turning to auditing software. According to eWeek, analysts said the pressure on healthcare organizations increased in 2007, when HIPAA began a series of audits with the surprise delivery of a list of 42 security and privacy requirements to an Atlanta hospital. Other surprise audits have followed, and more are anticipated.

Medical groups launch e-prescription advocate site

Five doctors’ organizations have launched a Web site and campaign designed to persuade physicians to switch to electronic prescribing. According to PC World, the Web site includes a technology guide to help doctors in their move to e-prescribing, provides perspectives of other doctors on the benefits of e-prescribing, and points to connected pharmacies.

The Get Connected campaign and the GetRxConnected.com Web site is aimed at the 94% of doctors in the United States who still do not write prescriptions electronically.
Web-based tool eases flow of medical information

NoMoreClipboard.com of Fort Wayne, IN, has launched a Web-based tool designed to ease the flow of medical information between different electronic records and health information networks. According to The Journal Gazette, the company developed the tool called FroozHIE to compare information, such as medications, from different sources side by side. For example, FroozHIE can compare patient information sent remotely from a personal health record alongside data in an electronic medical record at the doctor’s office.

To access the tool, visit NoMoreClipboard.com. The site currently has 20,000 subscribers. Annual subscriptions average $19.95 for individuals and $29.95 for families.

Surgeons navigating lungs with 3-D maps

Surgeons at University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill are using electromagnetic seeds to make landmarks in lungs to help them perform more accurate biopsies for patients facing cancer.

According to The Miami Herald, the system begins with the patient having a special CT scan that is used to create a 3-D map of the lungs. The map is used to chart the quickest route to nodules in the lungs, while electromagnetic seeds are placed to mark the way.

Senator unveils plan for EMRs

In Massachusetts, Senate President Therese Murray is pushing a bill requiring the state to adopt electronic medical records (EMR). According to The Boston Globe, the bill sets aside $25 million to help create the statewide system of EMRs by 2015. Doctors will have to show competency in the technology for medical board registration.

Physicians’ Social Security numbers went on the Web

A health insurance company in California notified more than 100,000 doctors in 11 states that their personal information was posted on the Internet, raising a risk of identity theft.

According to the Associated Press, the doctors’ Social Security numbers were accidentally posted on a Web site of Health Net Federal Services in Rancho Cordova, CA, for about two months. Health Net Federal Services will pay for a year’s worth of credit monitoring for the doctors involved.

Will .md pay off?

An entrepreneur is buying up .md URLs for individual cities, creating YourCity.MD, a network of about 300 city-specific health-care Web sites. According to The Cincinnati Enquirer, the creator is willing to wager that consumers looking for a new doctor, a flu shot, or a referral for shoulder surgery, for example, will flock to the sites and anticipates that 200,000 doctors will be using the sites by the end of the year.
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HEALTHCARE GUIDE TO THE INTERNET

Focus: Gastroenterology resources

by Cynthia Johnson

The medical specialty of gastroenterology—sometimes incorrectly referred to as “GI” for “gastrointestinal”—focuses on the study, diagnosis, and treatment of disorders of the digestive system. These disorders may affect the esophagus, stomach, small intestine, large intestine, rectum, liver, gallbladder, or pancreas.

Hepatology, a subspecialty of gastroenterology, is emerging as its own medical specialty. Hepatology focuses on the field of liver disease, including the study of hepatitis, cirrhosis, liver cancer, liver transplantation, and immunology of the liver. We have included some hepatology resources within our gastroenterology site reviews, such as the American Liver Foundation site (www.liverfoundation.org).

The American College of Gastroenterology site (www.gi.org) is a great place to begin your research. The site contains one area for physicians and another for patients, offering something for everyone, from slides and lecture programs to videos and a digestive health “Web book.”

The International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders site (www.iffgd.org) is another great resource. Its Learning Center contains brochures, fact sheets, and publications in Spanish and English. It also houses a Video Corner.

If you want a site that can point you in the right direction, you can’t lose with the National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse (NDDIC) site (http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov). It contains an alphabetical list of topics and titles, along with links to sites that have additional information.

A number of gastroenterology resources are described and reviewed in the following pages, as listed in the index below, using the five-star system to rate each on content, interface, and style.

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The American College of Gastroenterology (ACG) was founded in 1932 to advance the scientific study and medical practice of diseases of the GI tract. The ACG educates specialists, represents clinicians practicing in the field, ensures quality in patient care, and promotes patient education.

The site contains two areas of interest to readers, one for physicians and another for patients.
The site also contains a Members area that requires a member login. Some of the key features of this site include:

- Educational brochures for patients on topics such as GI bleeding, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), colonoscopy, and colorectal cancer
- A self-assessment test tool for GI board certification
- Telephone hotline contact information
- Slides and lecture programs for physicians on topics such as pediatric GERD, inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), GI motility, and GI health for seniors
- A GI physician locator tool
- Patient information about celiac disease, colon cancer, Crohn's disease, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), GERD, IBD, and more
- Quick health sheets on topics such as abdominal pain syndrome, constipation, fatty liver disease, foodborne illness, laparoscopic surgery, and more
- Links to external resources
- Videos on topics such as GERD and IBS relief

**Unique elements:** The site contains a Web-based resource for patients, including chapters from a digestive health “Web Book.” The chapters provide an in-depth review for patients with digestive problems and their families.

**Comments:** Patients can sign up to receive the ACG free patient newsletter, Digestive Health Smart Brief.

**Cost:** The majority of information on the site is free with the exception of the Members area, which is restricted and password protected.

**RSS XML link:** None.

**Keywords:** gastroenterology, gastroenterologist, The American College of Gastroenterology, ACG.

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**American Dietetic Association**

www.eatright.org

**Ratings:** Content: **** Interface: **** Style: *****

The American Dietetic Association (ADA) is an association with approximately 65,000 members. Founded in 1917, it is the largest organization of food and nutrition professionals.

The Food & Nutrition Information section contains resources for consumers, such as fact sheets, nutrition tips, nutrition brochures, a reading list, and more, to help them improve their eating habits with the goal of achieving a healthier lifestyle. The Careers & Students section serves as an online resource for people interested in education and credentialing requirements for careers in dietetics and nutrition. Here, you’ll find education flowcharts, information sheets, and degree program information.

**Unique elements:** The Food & Nutrition Information section contains resources for professionals, such as an FAQ, a newsletter database, bariatric surgery information, and disaster preparedness resources.

**Comments:** Other resources on the site include conference and event information, professional development information, and news articles.

**Cost:** The majority of the site is free with the exception of the Members-only section, which includes items such as the online version of the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*. Click on the Join ADA link to learn more about becoming a member, which includes the ability to take advantage of programs, products, and resources. The site has an online store and accepts online donations as well.

**RSS XML link:** None.

**Keywords:** gastroenterology, diet, food, nutrition, American Dietetic Association, ADA.

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**American Gastroenterological Association**

www.gastro.org

**Ratings:** Content: ***** Interface: **** Style: ****

The American Gastroenterological Association (AGA) works to advance the science and practice of gastroenterology.
Founded in 1897, it is the oldest medical specialty society in the United States. Its members include physicians and scientists who research, diagnose, and treat disorders of the GI tract and liver. The AGA Patient Center is robust. The majority of the information in the Patient Center has been written by AGA members. Users can click on a condition to learn more about it, such as celiac disease, hepatitis, IBS, lactose intolerance, and more. This section also contains a helpful article that describes how the digestive system works.

Cost: The majority of the information on the site is free with the exception of the Member Resources area, which requires login credentials. Click on the Membership link on the home page to learn more.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: gastroenterology, American Gastroenterological Association, AGA.

American Liver Foundation

www.liverfoundation.org

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: **** Style: *****

The American Liver Foundation (ALF) is a nonprofit organization that promotes liver health and disease prevention. The foundation provides research, education, and advocacy for those affected by liver-related diseases.

From the home page, you can access resources on a number of liver diseases and related topics, such as hepatitis, fatty liver, alcohol-induced liver disease, galactosemia, liver cancer, liver transplant, Reye syndrome, and Wilson disease.

The site’s Liver Disease Information Center is particularly helpful. It contains articles and a patient toolkit to help users who are searching for more information.

“The Progression of Liver Disease” is one article that users should take the time to read.

Some of the key features of the ALF site include:

» Brochure downloads
» Fact sheets
» Links to related external Web sites
» Tips for caregivers
» Information for researchers
» News articles
» Event information

Unique elements: The site contains patient videos on topics such as ulcerative colitis.

Comments: Other resources on the site include an online store, a calendar of events, and conference information.
Unique elements: The site’s interactive features are located in The Liver Channel section. Here you’ll find a series of streaming video interviews and Webcasts.

Comments: You can locate a chapter of the nearest ALF by selecting your state from the Locate a Chapter dropdown list on the home page.

Cost: Free. If you like the content on this site, you can subscribe to the mailing list and receive e-mail newsletters.

RSS XML link: For a complete list, visit www.liverfoundation.org/rss.

Keywords: gastroenterology, hepatology, liver disease, American Liver Foundation, ALF.

The site offers a Kids & Teens area that contains information tailored for young patients, such as a back-to-school guide.

Unique elements: Some of the interactive elements on the site include Webcasts and discussion boards.

Comments: Other resources on the site include a Find a Physician locator, a clinical trials locator, links to external resources, and information about events.

Cost: The majority of the information on the site is free. Membership varies from $30 to $1,000. You can sign up to receive the foundation’s free e-mail newsletter by entering your address in the field at the top of the home page and clicking Sign Up.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: gastroenterology, Crohn’s disease, colitis, Crohn’s & Colitis Foundation of America.

Hepatitis Foundation International
www.hepfi.org

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: **** Style: ****

The mission of the Hepatitis Foundation International (HFI) is to eradicate viral hepatitis, which affects more than 500 million people around the world.

The HFI Web site is chock-full of information in a variety of formats.

In the Living with Hepatitis section, users can learn more about liver care, hepatitis prevention, diagnosis and treatment, living with hepatitis, and communicating with physicians.

For those unfamiliar with Crohn’s and Colitis who want to learn more, the site has a Disease Information section. It contains overview information about IBD, including treatment and surgery options and educational brochures.
Other resources on the site include:
» News articles
» Clinical trials information
» Drug alerts
» Support group contact information
» A list of videos and DVDs
» Booklets and brochures
» Information sheets
» Books
» Posters

Unique elements: The HFI has an online learning center users will want to explore. It hosts educational presentations about hepatitis for clinicians and the public.

Comments: The HFI offers documents in various languages; call 800/891-0707 to request them.
Cost: Free.
RSS XML link: None.
Keywords: gastroenterology, liver disease, hepatitis, Hepatitis Foundation International, HFI.

International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders
www.iffgd.org
Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: ***** Style: *****

Founded in 1991, the International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD) is a nonprofit education and research organization. The foundation’s mission is “to inform, assist, and support people affected by gastrointestinal (GI) disorders.” IFFGD works with patients, families, physicians, practitioners, investigators, employers, regulators, and others to broaden understanding about GI disorders and to support or encourage research.

To access basic overview information, click on the GI Disorders link on the top of the home page. The pages here discuss how GI disorders affect adults, children, and teenagers. It also contains patient stories and information about other disorders that can affect the digestive tract.

The Learning Center of the site is where you’ll find brochures, fact sheets, and other publications. You can access its contents from the home page. This area offers information in Spanish as well. You’ll also find a glossary, links to external sites, and a list of support groups. And, if you’d like information about studies being conducted, click on the Research and Clinical Trials link.

Other resources on the site include an online store, news articles, and event information.

Unique elements: The Learning Center contains a Video Corner. Here you’ll find videos on the following topics: causes and treatments, inflammation, research advances, kids and teens, and serotonin.

Comments: Other IFFGD sites worth checking out include: aboutIBS.org, aboutConstipation.org, aboutIncontinence.org, aboutKidsGI.org, giResearch.org, and aboutgiMotility.org.
Cost: The majority of the information on the site is free.
Basic registration allows you to download and view complimentary content from the Learning Center. To find out more about membership, click on the Membership link on the home page.

RSS XML link: None.
Keywords: gastroenterology, gastroenterologist, gastrointestinal disorders, GI disorders, International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders, IFFGD.

National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse (NDDIC)
http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/index.htm
Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: ***** Style: *****

Established in 1980, the National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse (NDDIC) is an information dissemination service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK). The NIDDK is part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH).
From the home page, users can click on Digestive Diseases to access an alphabetical list of topics and titles, such as bacteria and foodborne illness, celiac disease, colonoscopy, Crohn’s disease, heartburn, IBS, and much more. The materials come in many forms, including brief overviews, easy-to-read booklets, and fact sheets.

Other resources on the site include:
- Statistics for digestive diseases in U.S. populations
- Clinical trials and guidelines
- Overviews of common digestive diseases used to raise awareness among people not yet diagnosed
- A Celiac Disease Awareness Campaign used to raise awareness among health professionals and the public
- Resources, such as patient organizations, health features and tools, government agencies, and related databases

Unique elements: Click on Additional Resources. It contains links to lists of organizations that represent health professionals involved in the study and treatment of digestive diseases.

Comments: The site contains information in Spanish.

Cost: Free.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: gastroenterology, digestive and kidney diseases, National Institutes of Health, NIH, National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, NIDDK, National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse, NDDIC.

**National Foundation for Celiac Awareness**
www.celiaccentral.org

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: ***** Style: *****

The National Foundation for Celiac Awareness (NFCA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to finding a cure for celiac disease.

The organization’s mission is to raise awareness and funding for celiac disease to advance research, education and screening, and improve the quality of life for those affected by the disease.

The What is Celiac? link on the home page is where you’ll find all the basic information about the disease. The page contains information about symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, related diseases, gluten in medication, and much more. You’ll even find a “Celiac Survival Guide.”

The Ask the Chef area contains information about gluten-free cooking. Users can submit questions to a chef. Past questions covered topics like how to prepare Chinese food, sponge cake, and nut-free breads.

Unique elements: The site contains educational videos about the disease. You’ll find them under the What is Celiac? link.

Comments: Other resources on the site include news articles, event information, and links to external sites.

Cost: Free. If you like the information on the site, consider signing up to receive e-mail updates by clicking on the Join Our Email List link on the home page.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: gastroenterology, celiac disease, National Foundation for Celiac Awareness, NFCA.

**North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology, and Nutrition**
www.naspghan.org

Ratings: Content: **** Interface: ***** Style: ****

The mission of the North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology, and Nutrition (NASPGHAN) is to advance understanding of normal development, physiology, and pathophysiology of diseases of the GI tract and liver in children. The society consists of more than 1,400 pediatric gastroenterologists.

The Education & Training section of the site contains information about meetings, events, professional resources, and training opportunities. The society provides continuing education for members.
The Careers section is another area of interest for gastroenterology professionals. It includes information about mentoring programs, research opportunities, professional development, and job opportunities.

The Family Resources section contains information about the conditions and diseases that pediatric gastroenterologists treat, such as chronic abdominal pain, diarrhea, constipation, vomiting, IBD, and liver diseases.

In this section, you can learn about treatments and procedures. The area also contains a glossary of GI-related terminology.

Unique elements: The Publications area contains the society’s newsletter, journal, clinical guidelines, and position statements.

Comments: Other resources on the site include news articles and a pediatric gastroenterologist lookup tool.

Cost: The majority of the information on the site is free with the exception of the Member Center, which requires login credentials.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: gastroenterology, pediatric gastroenterology, hepatology, nutrition, North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology, and Nutrition, NASPGHAN.
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HEALTHCARE GUIDE TO THE INTERNET

Focus: Migraine resources

by Cynthia Johnson

According to the National Headache Foundation (NHF), more than 28 million Americans suffer from migraines, a neurological condition whose exact causes remain unknown. Migraines typically bring on a host of moderate to severe symptoms, which range from nausea to extreme light sensitivity.

We have gathered a number of excellent migraine resources for you to consider. A good place to start is the NHF site (www.headaches.org). It contains information for headache sufferers and healthcare professionals. Users can take an online quiz on the site and share the information with their physicians.

The Migraine Action Association site (www.migraine.org.uk) is another must-see. The site includes a number of interactive elements alongside basic overview information about the condition.

For population-specific information, check out the American Academy of Family Physicians site (http://familydoctor.org) for migraine information pertaining to children and adolescents and the Women’s Health Information Center (http://womenshealth.gov/faq/migraine.htm) for information about how migraines are closely tied to menstrual cycles. A number of migraine resources are described and reviewed in the following pages, as listed in the index below, using the five-star system to rate each on content, interface, and style.

American Academy of Family Physicians
http://familydoctor.org

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: **** Style: ****

The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) operates the Familydoctor.org site. The AAFP is a national medical organization that represents family physicians, family practice residents, and medical students.

According to the AAFP site, migraines affect 5% of children in grade school and 20% of adolescents in high school. They more often affect girls than boys. For information specific to these populations, you’ll want to consult with experts at the AAFP.

To access the migraine content on the site, select Conditions A–Z, and then select “M” for migraine. You’ll find two listings: “Migraine Headache in Children and Adolescents” and “Migraine Headaches: Ways to Deal with the Pain.”

Some of the key features on this site include information about:
   » Basic migraine headaches
   » Migraine triggers
   » Causes of migraines

Index: Migraine resources

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Womenshealth.gov: Migraine Headaches ……………………… 23
How doctors diagnose a migraine
Treating migraine headaches with prescription and nonprescription medications
Preventing future migraines
Resources for additional information

Unique elements: The site contains a list of frequent phrases that children use to describe migraines, making it easier for parents to identify that there may be a problem.

Comments: All of the information on the site has been written and reviewed by patient education professionals at the AAFP.

Cost: Free.
RSS XML link: None.
Keywords: migraine, headache, children, adolescents, Familydoctor.org, American Academy of Family Physicians, AAFP.

American Academy of Neurology Foundation: The Brain Matters
www.thebrainmatters.org
Ratings: Content: **** Interface: **** Style: *****

The American Academy of Neurology Foundation, or AAN Foundation, is a 501(c)(3) organization affiliated with the AAN. The foundation supports education and research in neurology and works to improve patient care, quality of life, and public understanding of brain and other neurological disorders. The Brain Matters site is a resource from the AAN Foundation.

The goal of the site is to help users better understand common brain disorders and learn about people living with the disorders. To access the migraine information on the site, choose Migraine from the list of disorders in the scrolling banner on the home page. Some of the key features of this section include:

- Basic information about the condition
- Causes of migraines
- How health professionals diagnose the condition
- Treatment information, such as avoiding triggers, medications, and cognitive and behavioral treatments
- Migraine prevention tips related to diet, sleep, stress, and environmental factors
- Patient stories
- How to cope with migraines
- Links to external resources
- Research information

Unique elements: Additional content on the site includes information for children and educators, families and friends, and research information. The site also contains advice to help patients work better with their physicians.

Comments: Neurologists developed the content on this site.
Cost: Free. Users can sign up to receive the foundation’s free patient-interest magazine, Neurology Now.
RSS XML link: None.
Keywords: migraine, headache, American Academy of Neurology Foundation, AAN Foundation, The Brain Matters.

U.S. Food and Drug Administration: Managing Migraines
www.fda.gov/fdac/features/2006/206_migraines.html
Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: ** Style: *****

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is responsible for ensuring the safety, efficacy, and security of human and veterinary drugs, biological products, medical devices, the nation’s food supply, cosmetics, and products that emit radiation.

FDA Consumer magazine had an article in its March/April 2006 issue titled “Managing Migraines,” which contained such useful information that we are including it in the site review. Keep in mind, however, because it is an article, it is completely text-based and noninteractive online. Some of the topics addressed in this article include:
The difference between migraines and headaches
Migraine symptoms
Causes and triggers
Diagnosis
Medications to relieve and prevent symptoms
How migraines affect women and children

Unique elements: The article contains a list of FDA-approved medications for migraine headaches.

Comments: It contains a list of helpful over-the-counter remedies.

Cost: Free.


Keywords: migraine, headache, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Food and Drug Administration, FDA.

Migraine Action Association
www.migraine.org.uk

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: ***** Style: *****

The Migraine Action Association (MAA) is a British non-profit association with more than 100,000 members. It focuses its efforts on three main areas: information exchange, research and investigation, and support. It provides information about all aspects of migraines, such as causes, diagnosis, and treatment.

The About Migraine link on the home page is probably the most helpful area of the site. Here users will find information about who gets migraines, what they are, and migraine treatments. Some of the key features of this site include:

Unique elements: The site has many interactive elements, such as a message board, an ask-the-expert tool, and a Web log forum.

Comments: The MAA currently offers a free 14-day trial membership. Click on the Free Trial link for more information.

Cost: The majority of the information on the site is free, with certain areas and content restricted to members only. For information about membership, click About MAA and select Membership.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: migraine, headache, Migraine Action Association, MAA.

The Migraine Trust
www.migrainetrust.org

Ratings: Content: **** Interface: **** Style: ****

Founded in 1965 and based in London, the Migraine Trust is the United Kingdom’s medical research and patient support...
The Migraine Trust site contains the following key features:

- Publications such as fact sheets, information packs, research articles, and newsletters
- FAQs about migraines
- Recent news articles
- Information aimed at migraine sufferers, such as how it is diagnosed, migraine diaries, treatment methods, how to avoid attacks, symptoms, managing migraines, and much more
- Information for health professionals, such as books about migraines, courses, migraine clinics, current issues, managing migraine, and diagnosing migraine
- Migraine statistics in the United Kingdom

The site contains two areas—one for headache sufferers and another for healthcare professionals. The headache sufferer area contains information about headache causes, treatments, and self-management tips.

The healthcare professional area contains information about headache diagnosis and treatment methods.

Some of the key features of this site include:

- Educational resources, such as modules, information about causes and treatments, and excerpts from the newsletter NHF Head Lines.
- Continuing medical education opportunities
- Online tools, such as a headache measurement tool and a headache diary form
- Event and program information, such as support group listings, e-mail pen pal programs, and an art gallery
- An online store containing educational materials
- A list of clinical trials
- Links to external headache resource sites and pharmaceutical company sites

Unique elements: The site contains an online quiz that users can take and then share with their healthcare provider.

Comments: The site includes a video clip of a public service announcement by former football player Troy Aikman.

Cost: Free. Registration with the site is optional, but it does help the NHF provide you with information better suited to your needs, such as information about newly approved medications, educational programs in your area, and headache news.

RSS XML link: None.
The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke
www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/migraine/migraine.htm

Ratings: Content: **** Interface: ***** Style: ****

The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS) works to reduce the burden of neurological disease. It does so by conducting research, providing grants and fellowships, and collecting and disseminating medical information related to neurological disorders.

To access the migraine information on the site, select Disorders, and then select Migraine. The topic has a table of contents at the top of the page to make navigating the content easier. Some of the resources on the site include:

- An overview of migraines
- Migraine treatments
- The prognosis for migraine sufferers in treating their condition
- Research that is being conducted and a link to a list of research studies that are seeking patients
- Links to additional organizations and resources

Unique elements: Don’t miss the related NINDS publications listed on the right-hand side of the home page. They contain titles such as “Headache,” “Chronic Pain,” and “21st Century Prevention and Management of Migraine Headaches.”

Comments: You can also select Headache from the Disorders topic list to view more information.

Cost: Free.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: migraine, headache, National Institutes of Health, NIH, National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, NINDS.

The National Migraine Association
www.migraines.org

Ratings: Content: **** Interface: *** Style: **

MAGNUM (Migraine Awareness Group: A National Understanding for Migraineurs): The National Migraine Association is a nonprofit healthcare public education organization. It was founded in 1993 to raise public and government awareness about migraines as a biologic neurological disease. Some of the key features of this site include:

- A page that addresses the myths and realities about the condition
- Coping tips for use at work and at home
- Current and proposed legislation for migraine sufferers
- Medical studies
- Treatment methods, including complementary therapies and prescription medication
- Migraine management articles
- An online forum

Unique elements: The site contains interactive surveys, polls, quizzes, and games.

Comments: The Where to Turn for Help section contains links to external resources and organizations that can provide further information.

Cost: Free.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: migraine, headache, The National Migraine Association, Migraine Awareness Group: A National Understanding for Migraineurs, MAGNUM.

Neurologychannel
www.neurologychannel.com/migraine/index.shtml

Ratings: Content: **** Interface: ***** Style: *****

Neurologychannel.com is a medical information Web site of Healthcommunities.com, Inc., which provides physician-developed patient education for consumers. The site
offers information about conditions that affect the nervous system (brain, spinal cord, nerves, and muscles). To access the migraine content on the site, select Migraine under the left-hand list of conditions listed on the home page. The Migraine page contains the following key features:

- An overview of migraine headaches—types, incidence, causes, and symptoms
- Information about how physicians diagnose the condition
- Treatment methods
- Naturopathic treatment methods
- Living with the condition
- An online forum where users can discuss and exchange comments with one another

Unique elements: The site contains videos on the following topics: What Makes a Migraine?, What are the Different Types of Headaches?, and What is Chronic Pain?

Comments: If you like this site, consider visiting the other Healthcommunities.com sites. You can click on any of the Healthcommunities.com links on the site to see a complete list. You’ll find they use the same format and contain the same elements.

Cost: Free.
RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: migraine, headache, Healthcommunities.com, Neurologychannel.

Womenshealth.gov: Migraine Headaches
http://womenshealth.gov/faq/migraine.htm

Ratings: Content: **** Interface: *** Style: **

The National Women’s Health Information Center is a service of the Office on Women’s Health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The center is a resource for reliable information about women’s health. Through its call center and Web site, it offers information about more than 800 topics that affect women.

To access the migraine information on the site, click Health Topics, then click the More link under Frequently Asked Questions, and then select Migraine Headaches. You’ll find it listed under Pain (Chronic Conditions & Treatment).

Some of the questions that the FAQ section answers include:

- What is a migraine headache?
- What causes a migraine?
- How does a migraine headache differ from a tension headache?
- When should I seek help for my headaches?
- What tests are used to find out if I have migraine?
- How is a woman’s menstrual cycle related to migraine?
- How are migraines treated?
- What are some ways I can prevent migraine?

Unique elements: Because migraines are closely linked to menstrual cycles, the National Women’s Health Information Center is the place to go for content specifically geared toward women and migraines.

You’ll find information about pregnancy and migraines, breastfeeding and medication, birth control pills and migraines, and more.

Comments: The site contains links to other sites that contain further information.

Cost: Free.
RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: migraine, headache, National Women’s Health Information Center, Womenshealth.gov, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
Founded in 1959, the American Headache Society (AHS) is a professional society of physicians and healthcare providers dedicated to the study and treatment of headache and face pain. The society’s objectives are to promote the exchange of information and ideas about the causes and treatments of headache and related painful disorders. The primary goal of the society is to educate physicians, health professionals, and the public and to encourage scientific research.

ACHE is the acronym for the AHS Committee for Headache Education. Although ACHE has its own URL (www.achenet.org), users can access the same information on the free AHS site under the ACHE banner on the left-hand side of the home page. ACHE serves as an educational resource for physicians, healthcare providers, and patients looking for resources and education. The ACHE site contains educational information about headache topics such as migraine, headache treatments, tracking headaches, nonpharmacological management, and trigger avoidance.

The AHS site has two areas of interest that users can access from the left-hand side of the home page. The first, as mentioned earlier, is found under the banner ACHE and is aimed toward patients and the public. The second, under the AHS banner, is for health professionals.

The site has a wealth of information about headaches and migraines. Some of the migraine-specific resources include:

- Basic overview information, such as biological causes, treatment strategies, and tips patients can use to work with healthcare providers
- A description of migraine and common morbidities, such as depression, anxiety, stroke, irritable bowel syndrome, epilepsy, and hypertension
- Information about how migraines affect women
- Common and preventive treatment information
- Migraine variants in children, such as abdominal migraine, benign paroxysmal vertigo, and cyclic vomiting syndrome
- Information about the link between patient foramen ovales, or PFOs, and migraines
- A “Headache Hygiene Tips” table that contains detailed trigger avoidance information, such as what foods, activities, and stresses to avoid
- Publications
- A Literature Center that contains books on headache and links to articles on the Web
- An Art Gallery that contains patients’ work
- Professional Resources for clinicians and information for headache specialists

The site contains many helpful tools, such as a headache diary, tests, school nurse instruction forms, patient information and instruction forms, and a provider lookup tool.

Other resources on the site include links to external resources, news articles, and a calendar of events.

The majority of the information on the site is free, but some areas, such as the Member Login, are restricted to members only. To learn more about membership, click on the Learn More link under the Member Benefits title on the home page. 

Questions? Comments? Ideas?
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