

## **Health Standard #2: Accessing information, products and services**

Youth make many health-related decisions in their lives, and they must do so in an environment that often is bombarded with incomplete and inaccurate information. Additionally, information changes as new discoveries are made. Teaching students how to identify, evaluate and access health-enhancing products and services is as important as learning health information itself. Health information on the internet is particularly variable, yet has the potential to dramatically affect health decisions.

Teachers can assist students in evaluating health-related information by asking questions that address specific criteria. Some of these questions are specific to the internet; others apply to all health-related information.

### 1. Credibility:

- a. Is the source a trusted authority? Some samples of sources commonly seen as credible are: a licensed medical practitioner related to illness unless proven otherwise, organized groups of health care providers, organizations such as consumer advocacy groups, public health communities, hospitals, government health agencies and university medical schools
- b. Is it current? Currency of a health-related source such as a website can be defined as keeping up with the present state of medical/clinical knowledge. The date of the original document and the date of the content posting should be displayed so the user can judge the timeliness of the information.
- c. Is it relevant (how close does the actual content of the site correspond to the information it purports to provide)?
- d. Does it have utility (how useful is the site)? Does it provide tools needed by the user?
- e. Has the information been editorially reviewed? The function of editorial control is to provide a peer review process. This gives a "seal of approval" from an individual or group commonly perceived to be credible. There is no editorial control over material on the Internet. Peer-reviewed journal articles can be great sources of reliable information.
- f. Is there a conflict of interest? It is important to consider the motivation of the site's sponsor. For instance, websites created and maintained by product manufacturers can be expected to cast their products in the best possible light.

### 2. Content

- a. Is it accurate or scientifically valid? The evidence used to present the information should be explained, and the underlying data that led to the conclusions presented. Youth should be skeptical of claims of "amazing results" or if basic science and widely accepted medical principles are attacked. Even when information is complicated, it should be presented in language that a lay person can understand, using sound research.
- b. Is the original source stated? If the content is not original information, its source should be clearly indicated. Credentials of the author should be clearly shown.

- c. Is a disclaimer included that describes the limitations, purpose, scope, authority and currency of the information? The disclosure should state that the content is general health information and not medical advice.
- d. Are omissions noted? Although an article or website can endorse a particular side of an issue, the user should be alerted to any omissions. Additionally, a reliable article or website should include references to other reputable sources.

3. Disclosure:

- a. Is the mission or purpose of the site displayed clearly? Is the primary function to market products and services or to serve as a primary information?
- b. content provider
- c. If a website asks your child to provide input or register, has the purpose for obtaining that information been disclosed? The following should all be disclosed: who is sponsoring the site, the purpose of the site, whether the information will be retained and by whom, whether information regarding the user's computer or service is being obtained, whether user patterns are being captured, what the information will be used for, and whether it will be given to others.

4. Links:

- a. Are the links relevant to the intended audience? A site aimed at children should avoid links to sites for adults.
- b. Is it easy for your child to find their way backwards and forwards – is it organized well? Do the links lead to high-quality sites such as those maintained by recognized agencies?

5. Design:

- a. Is the website accessible without requiring high-end technology?
- b. Does the site have an internal search engine (is it capable of searching specified content by keywords)?

6. Interactivity:

- a. Reputable journals and websites provide a feedback mechanism for their readers. Is there a link to send criticism or comments?
- b. If there is a chat room to allow information to be exchanged among individuals, is there a moderator, along with a warning that the information shared may not be accurate?

(Sources: 1. *American Journal of Public Health* 513 Association News March 2001, Vol. 91, No.3

2. *Criteria for Assessing the Quality of Health Information on the Internet*, Agency for Health Care Policy and Research, 1997.)