GROUP ACTIVITY: Health Websites

In groups you are being asked to use your smartphones, tablets, or laptops (any device in which you have internet access) to identify THREE websites related to your assigned illness: **HIV/AIDS, Heart Disease (Cardiovascular Disease), Chronic Pain, and Cancer.**

Website #1: The first website you identify should represent a source through which patients can receive *emotional* support for their illness. This may be in the form of a blog, discussion group, or online forum.

Website # 2: The second website you identify should represent a source through which patients can receive *information* about their illness. Please be sure to think about the credibility of your website (as you are certain to run into some "not-so-good" ones).

Website #3: The third website you identify should represent a source that is specifically targeting a racial group in the United States. I want you to identify a website that offers either emotional support or informational support to a *specific* racial group.

The purpose of this assignment is for you to critically examine each website and determine their value in light of what we've discussed in class. Is it helpful? Relevant? Effective? Does it consider the biopsychosocial approach? (see attached evaluation criteria)

The assignment includes several parts:

1) Identify the 3 websites specified above
2) Provide a critique, **in the form of a grade,** for each evaluative criteria (see handout)
   a. Also, give the website an *overall* grade based on it meeting evaluation criteria
3) Present your findings in ONE powerpoint slide on Thursday 4/2/2015
   a. Include visuals of the website, as well as the grade. Elaborate through the presentation (talking) how you determined the grade.
   b. Also—talk about the experience of searching for the websites. Did you run into any problems? Any great sites? Any terrible sites?

# Evaluating Health Websites

Content on the Internet is unregulated; anyone can publish anything on the Internet. There is sound medical information on the Internet along with dangerous information. You need to be able to tell the difference.

Ask yourself the following:

- Why did the person create the page?
- What's in it for them?
- Are they trying to sell me something?

Criteria for evaluating information from the web:

## Accuracy

- Is the information based on sound medical research? Can the information on the web page be verified by another source?
- Are the sources cited reliable?
- Are there grammatical and spelling errors?
- Are there footnotes, bibliographies, or references so that you can verify the information? Are these reliable? (a citation to *Parade* magazine does not have the same weight as an article from *JAMA* )

## Authority

- Who published the page? What are the person's credentials? What do you know about them?
- Is the person backed by a known organization? (the American Association for Cancer Therapy may be a made-up name for something operating out of someone's basement.)
- Is the person affiliated with a university? If so, is the person a student or a faculty member?
- Can you easily find contact information on the web page? Check the about us link, usually found at the beginning or the end of a webpage. What does the About Us section tell you about the purpose of the organization? Can you find a physical location for the organization? Or is the only way to contact the organization through a webform?
- What is the domain name? (.edu, .gov ) Is it a personal page or supported by the organization? The tilde (~) means that the site is a personal page (compare an address like med.harvard.edu/~jsmith/headache to med.harvard.edu/neurology/headache)

## Bias/Objectivity

- Is the information showing just one point of view?

- What kind of institution sponsored the webpage? A pharmaceutical company? A non-profit organization?
- Is advertising clearly marked?
- Can you tell if the information you are reading is advertisement?
- Do the graphics, fonts, and verbiage play to th emotions? Beware of CAPITAL LETTERS, EXCLAMATION POINTS!!!!! Or words like MIRACLE CURE!!!
- Is the author using data improperly to promote a position or a product?

## Currency/Timeliness

- Is there a date on the page?
- When was the page last updated?
- Do the links work?
- Has there been more recent research on the subject? Many medical treatments change with the publication of new studies. What was published a year ago may be outdated now.

## Coverage

- Is the information complete?
- Are there sources given for additional information?

## Additional Resources

MedlinePlus (from the National Library of Medicine)
http://medlineplus.gov (health topic: health fraud)

MedlinePlus Guide to Healthy Web Surfing
http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/healthywebsurfing.html

Trust It or Trash It? (evaluation tool)

Trust It or Trash It? (printer-friendly handout)

Is This Health Information Good For Me? (from the National Network of Libraries of Medicine Pacific Northwest Region)
http://nnlm.gov/pnr/hip/criteria.html

**Update Author:**

Kelli Ham, Consumer Health & Technology Coordinator, National Network of Libraries of Medicine, Pacific Southwest Region, Los Angeles, CA