

## Consumer Health Initiatives: HealthLink Plus

### I. Who we are:

- A. Co-leaders of PLCMC team ... Diana Sachs and Christie Buchanan-Wellmon. Both are Information Specialists at PLCMC.
- B. The Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County or PLCMC is a county library system consisting of 23 locations, which include the Main Library and 5 regional libraries and 17 community and neighborhood branches.
- C. PLCMC has worked to have a strong presence on the Internet. This can be seen through the large family of web sites the library produces. They can be viewed at <http://www.plcmc.org> and range from storytelling to readers' advisory to business and health information.

### II. What is HealthLink Plus (HLP)?

- A. HLP is a consumer health web site that was designed by a team of librarians to assist patron access to the most current, reliable, and authoritative information both inside and outside the library.
- B. It features annotated links to selected web sites with a special category to focus on the Piedmont region of North Carolina.
- C. Further, it facilitates access to books through book reviews, and access to subscription databases that feature health & medical information.
- D. Why was HLP created?
  1. At service points, we regularly receive health questions. The most popular reference topics – most popular are career, business, homework and health questions.
  2. It was designed to facilitate access to the “best of the best” information on the Internet. The information designed for the consumer. Reliable, current, and authoritative information.
  3. To enhance public knowledge of important health and fitness issues.
- E. What HLP is not...
  1. Does not diagnose, interpret or recommend specific medical advise
  2. It does contain a disclaimer on each page.
- F. HLP debuted in August 2000. (After about one year of Research and development).
- G. HLP is a subject directory of health information for consumers.
- H. Overview of HLP.
  1. Assets: THE LIBRARIANS!!! Trained evaluators –who evaluate and organize information.
  2. “Yahoo” type- subject directory of information.
  3. Just the ‘best of the best’
  4. Established criteria for evaluation –
    - a. Avoided commercial sites where possible and focused on government, educational and non-profit agencies.
    - b. Provide original, up-to-date, authoritative information.
    - c. Easy to maneuver through site.
- I. Categories of HLP: General Health, Healthcare Providers, Insurance, Medical Research, Staying Healthy, Mental Health and Alternative Medicine.
- J. Each topic contains:
  1. Top Internet sites with an annotated review of the site – stressing why the site was selected and why it is unique. Web site name, and address also listed.
  2. Book reviews, all titles are available at PLCMC.
  3. Additional Resources (if no web site is available for an important resource, this is actually used fairly rarely these days on HLP.)
- K. Other HLP features:
  1. Site Search Engine, allows HLP to be searched by keyword.
  2. FAQs appears as a link when there are no results on the search engine.
  3. Access to subscription databases for patrons with PLCMC library card.
  4. Links to area medical libraries is listed, with contact information.
  5. Category called, “Evaluating Health Information on the Internet.” to help patrons learn what to look for when evaluating web sites on there own. After all, HLP is only a starting point for many.

6. Feedback, About Us, and Comments sections.
7. COMING SOON – HLP Quiz, patrons can quiz themselves on health issues & a Spanish language category.
8. Updates & Maintenance:
  1. MSAccess backend allows for real time changes without staff needing HTML knowledge.
  2. Last updated date on the bottom of the home page.

L. Award Winning

HLP has won several awards including: USA Today "Hot Site of the Day", "World Wide Web Awards, "Merit Winner", and Library Spot's "Reference Site of the Month" and "Reference Site of the Year."

III. People looking for Health information.

- A. 5 minutes with a doctor – forget to ask, think of questions later...
- B. Looking for alternative treatment options (Going to the doctor armed).
- C. Most often thinking about: Prescriptions (what are the side effects, what is this little blue pill), Diagnosis, (My doctor says I have...what does it mean), and treatment options (what are the options for my condition).

IV. Getting them to library resources:

- A. Educating the public – with 25+ million "health" web sites and 65+ million "medical" sites- how does one find the best information available...The highest caliber so to speak.
- B. Recent BMJ (British Medical Journal) article, stated when asked people say that they want – authority, easy-to-use, trustworthy, up-to-date web site to provide their health information; however, the same study found most people did not research the sites they found for this criteria when using a general search engine – in fact most never clicked on the "about Us" sections at all.
- C. Another BMJ article stated several studies conducted over the past five years have found (as many would suspect) that the "quality, accuracy, completeness, and consistency" of medical web sites greatly varies.
- D. HLP we have done this for the patron – instead of the first few arbitrary hits from a search engine we have sorted out the best.
- E. Quackery & Fraud are out there. The Internet provides an incredible forum where individuals with conditions can connect in a way never possible before - especially those with rarer conditions, but eyes need be open.

V. Study – of Health Related Information at PLCMC. (Survey conducted March 18-24, 2001)

- A. What we did: For one week each health related question was recorded by frontline staff via Telephone and In-person.
- B. What we found: 92 health related questions were recorded that week.
  1. 92 how does that relate? In the average week\* 3189 reference questions were asked through out the PLCMC in-person and via the telephone.
  2. An estimated 4784 health related questions were answered at PLCMC this year.
  3. Meaning 2.89% of all questions are health-related.
  4. A similar survey at New Hanover PL last year reported - Of the 733 transactions surveyed 56 (7.63%) were health related.
- C. A majority of health questions did not come through the main library but through regional branches through out the county.
- D. Questions fell into categories: (categories created based on HLP)
  1. Specific Diseases/Conditions-44 (47%)
  2. Medical Research-13 (14.1%)
  3. Staying Healthy (Preventative Medicine)-10 (10.8%)
  4. General Health-4 (4.34%)
  5. Pregnancy-4 (4.34%)
  6. Career, Children's Health & Population Issues – 2 each (2.17% each)
  7. Healthcare Providers & Insurance –1 each (1.08%)
- E. Limitations of study:
  1. Not every branch reported questions at end of survey period (not sure if meant 0 or just did not track).
  2. Does not count self-serving patrons.
  3. Counted in statistics are children's questions – like homework, etc.

VI. Interlibrary Loan & Collection Development.

- A. 4.1%- % of Money Spent of total Non-Fiction Budget in 2001.

- B. 5.7% -% of Interlibrary Loans Ordered by PLCMC in 2001.
- VII. Use of Electronic Resources
  - A. In survey 32 questions (34.7%) were answered completely or partially by electronic resources:
    1. 8 NCLive
    2. 12 HLP
    3. 16 Gale Group – Health Reference Center
    4. 10 General Internet
    5. 7 EBSCO
    6. 4 B&H
- VIII. Health Databases & PLCMC Subscriptions (not including NCLive products)
  1. Gale's 2001 - visitors 9093;
  2. Searches 39302
  3. Downloads – 26440
- IX. HealthLink Plus usage
  - A. Number of hits, etc for 2002 thus far...
  - B. Number of returning users, etc...
- X. Ways for Public Libraries to improve their consumer health collections –
  - A. Grants & Additional Funding
    1. One community branch – Beatties Ford Road at PLCMC received a grant to create a “Health Information Center” through, “Reach 2010”. Branch chosen because in an African-American community near the county health department office. More information: <http://www.cdc.gov/reach2010/>
    2. Other sources include: Nat'l library of Medicine and their “Health Information for the Public Projects.” More information at: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/>
    3. Libraries who join the *National Network of the Libraries of Medicine* can apply for funding for a wide variety of outreach activities. For more information call 1-800-338-7657 or go to [http://www.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/)
  - B. Free Resources (for brochures, pamphlets, displays, etc...)
    1. National Institutes of Health (<http://www.nih.gov/>)
    2. Federal consumer Information Center in Pueblo, CO (<http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/>)
    3. National and local associations, non-profits, government agencies and professional organizations (here are a few examples)...
      - a. American Psychological Association (<http://www.apa.org/>)
      - b. United Way (contact local office)
      - c. Cancer Information Service (<http://cis.nci.nih.gov/>)
      - d. North Carolina Healthy Start Foundation (<http://www.nchealthystart.org/>)
      - e. Nat'l Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (<http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/>)
      - f. Nat'l Center for Complementary & Alternative medicine (<http://nccam.nih.gov/>)
      - g. Office of Disease Prevention & Health Promotion (<http://odphp.osophs.dhhs.gov/>)
      - h. Nat'l Institute on Alcohol Abuse & Alcoholism (<http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/>)
      - i. Nat'l Medicare Education Program (<http://www.medicare.gov/nmep/>)
  - C. Collaborations.
    1. Liaisons with area AHEC libraries
    2. Becoming a member of the National Network of Libraries of Medicine.
    3. Working with County Health Department as a point of information dispersal.
    4. Place special health collections in libraries near local hospitals, & health departments
  - D. Classes and workshops
    1. Guest speakers from area medical community and librarians and other specialists on the Healthcare industry.
    2. Narrow and general medical topics – how to pick a doctors, herbs and preventive health, etc.
  - E. PR, PR, PR
    1. Found this is a must for HLP to be successful as well as special collections and databases
    2. Brochures at local medical groups, gyms, health food stores, religious houses, health department, community web sites.

3. Participate in community health fairs
  4. Outreach with local non-profits
  5. Used as a resource in the press – HLP has been featured in several magazine articles and on the television program “Healthy Connections” (<http://www.healthlinkplus.org/awards.asp>)
  6. Get newspaper to do a story featuring the library’s unique resources and or programs.
  7. Since promoting locally, have specialized local resources.
- F. Keep librarians knowledgeable
1. CHININFO listserv – <http://listserv.unc.edu/>
  2. Online classes, staff training and conferences for librarians
  3. MLA/ALA Consumer Health credential program
- XI. Special Populations
- A. HLP in process of adding Spanish element, a category with Spanish links and annotations.
  - B. Look at programs and titles for special populations -- some examples, ethnic groups, foreign languages, women’s health, children’s health, etc.
  - C. With children’s health, and similar titles might look at having a simultaneous children’s program.
- XII. Pulling this together and conclusions
- A. Promotion of the field – we are where people have turned and should continue to turn in the future.
  - B. Historically, currently and in the future, we provide Quality Control & Expertise to our patrons – we should be letting them know.
  - C. We should be working to establish selves in traditional access points and on WWW through web sites, live/digital chat reference, and through the telephone, faxing and in-person.
  - D. We should promote that patrons can access databases/journals and sources that people could not get hold of for free on the Internet.
  - E. Repeated theme – people are using the public library and the public library is providing information through traditional and nontraditional contact points.
  - F. Problem with healthcare information – people don’t use it, need it until sick. Return users can be a difficult point. Thus, constant promotion of our resources is necessary, so that patrons when they need us will know we are there.
- XIII. Contact Information.
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