HOW TO EVALUATE HEALTH INFORMATION FOUND ON THE INTERNET

A RESOURCE FOR VETERANS, SERVICE MEMBERS, AND THEIR FAMILIES

Many people get information on a variety of subjects— including health information— from the Internet. Because there is so much information readily available, and so many different sources, it is important to remember that not all information you may find is accurate or up-to-date. Just doing a search on the internet may give you lots of information but it can be hard to judge the accuracy and credibility of medical information you find without any guidance. Here are some tips to help you decide what information is believable and accurate:

- Compare the information you find on the Internet with other reliable resources. Check out medical/health guidebooks to see whether the information or advice is similar. Talk to your doctor or other trusted health care provider to clarify any contradictions in the information or advice you've received.

- Check the author's or organization's credentials. They should be clearly displayed on the website. If the credentials are missing, consider this a red flag. Unfortunately, there are many phony doctors and other health professionals making false claims on the Internet.

- Find out if the website is maintained by a reputable health organization. Remember that no one regulates information on the Internet. Anyone can set up a home page and claim anything. Sometimes Web sites may not represent an organization but rather are a compilation of individuals' thoughts and own experiences. While the information may seem interesting, it is important to know whether the person or organization has expertise in the area and the factual basis for statements made. Some reliable Web sites providing health information include those of government agencies, health foundations and associations, and medical colleges.

- Be wary of websites advertising and selling products that claim to improve your health. More importantly, be very careful about giving out creditcard information on the Internet. Further, even if nothing is being sold on a website, ask yourself if the site host has an interest in promoting a particular product or service. If a source is claiming one hundred percent positive or negative outcomes, chances are it's for advertising.

- Be cautious when using information found on bulletin boards or during "chat" sessions with others. Testimonials and personal stories are based on one person's experience and, while it's often helpful to hear what another person has learned or experienced, it may not be medically sound or relevant to your situation.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- **Harvard School of Public Health**
  http://www.health-insight-harvard.org

- **Medical Library Association**
  http://www.mlanet.org/resources/userguide.html

- **Medline Plus**
  http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/healthywebsurfing.html

- **National Library of Medicine**
  http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/webeval/webeval.html

VA | **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**
Veterans Health Administration
Office of Public Health