

Commissioner's Corner

Website-Based Health Education

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Advances in technology are changing the way in which we provide health information to the public and to clinicians. New Internet-based tools are becoming more available for use in patient education and physician education. The Westchester County Department of Health's website, www.westchestergov.com/health, is on the forefront of this new trend, making a wealth of information available to clinicians and their patients through office and home computers or through public library Internet connections. Consisting of nearly 2,000 web pages, the health department website is now receiving almost 4 million hits each year, as members of the public and clinicians look to the health department for the latest information on a wide variety of health topics.

Physician's Corner

Physicians are able to view the latest public health updates online through the Physician's Corner section of the website. The Physician's Corner provides information to the busy clinician on newly emerging public health threats, as well as offering links to updates on current issues from local, state, and national public health agencies. Through the Physician's Corner, clinicians can learn the latest information on bioterrorism and link to web-based courses for physicians provided by the New York State Health Department, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other national agencies. The Physician's Corner site also contains a compendium of the previous Commissioner's Corner columns from this publication that highlight important public health topics for practicing physicians.

Patient Education

When a physician is providing health care to a patient, there is often not enough time to provide in-depth patient education on topics of chronic disease prevention that are vital to the patient's long-term health. The health department website offers resources and health information that patients can access in the convenience and privacy of their own homes to assist them in developing lifelong healthy behaviors. Information and links to resources on HIV prevention, STD prevention, nutrition and obesity prevention, tobacco cessation, diabetes information, and a host of other topics are available on www.westchestergov.com/health.

Health Department Services

Nearly 75 different services are provided by the Westchester County Health Department to protect the health of the public. The full range of services can be viewed on the health department website, along with links to pages that describe each service and how it can be accessed. Available services are diverse and include tuberculosis and sexually transmitted disease clinics; services for children with special needs; inspections of restaurants, children's camps, swimming pools and bathing beaches; disease control and surveillance of communicable diseases reported by clinicians; provision of annual statistical reports and community health assessments used by local agencies for grants and health services planning; emergency response to public health threats; and environmental engineering reviews to assure safe drinking water and sewage facilities for new land development.

Another important service provided by the Health Department is assistance with enrollment in New York State health insurance programs, such as Child Health Plus and Family Health Plus. The Health Department website is a good place to refer patients for initial information on these programs and a list of community-based organizations throughout the County where they might find help with enrollment.

Please visit the Health Department's website at www.westchestergov.com/health and encourage your patients to utilize this website to learn what they need to know to improve their health through developing healthy lifestyle behaviors. Physicians may wish to provide patients with the health department "Get Caught in Our Web" card as a way of encouraging patients to access important health information in depth. For a supply of these postcard-sized cards, please contact Health Education and Information at (914) 813-5001. ♦