

WEBSITE REVIEWS

Websites for information on sexually transmitted infections

The British Association for Sexual Health & HIV (BASH) was formed by the amalgamation of the Medical Society for the Study of Venereal Diseases (MSSVD) and the Association for Genitourinary Medicine (AGUM). Their clearly designed website has a long list of guidelines for all the sexually transmitted infections and other genital infections. These can be downloaded using Adobe Acrobat (pdf files). Educational resources, including STIF courses, and details of forthcoming conferences are also listed. The website provides a link to the members' site that requires registration and you can download an application pack to join the Association. A link to the Faculty of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care website is included to refer viewers to guidelines on contraceptive issues. Some areas of this new website are still under construction. Website: <http://bashh.org>

The Society of Sexual Health Advisers provides an excellent site. The site map is clearly divided into areas of interest and a click takes you to sections for the public and for professionals. The public section contains an easy-to-use map with the locations of all the GUM clinics and their contact details, together with information about what happens at a GUM clinic. The information on STIs is excellent too – a model of how to explain medical conditions. This is the only site that I felt I could wholeheartedly recommend to both patients and professionals. Website: <http://www.ssha.info/index.html>

This website for the public has a North American slant. It lists links to relevant sites, references and information pages. It would be useful to recommend to someone newly diagnosed who really wants to read a lot. It does call STIs STDs, i.e. diseases, not illnesses, but the public are not too concerned about what they called! The main criticism is that none of the reference documents seem to be particularly recent. For example, the treatment guidelines link to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), for which free registration is required, is dated September 2002. Website: <http://thebody.com/safesex/stdbasics.html>

A link page hosted by the specialist STI journal published by the British Medical Journal lists almost everything professionals might need to know about STIs. Unfortunately, quite a few of the links did not work and the site needs updating. Website: <http://sti.bmjournals.com/misc/links.shtml>

A visit to the North Thames Regional Audit Programme Genitourinary and HIV Medicine would enable you to evaluate your own audit activities and gain ideas about how to do it (or do it better). You can also download presentations on the management of various STIs or related conditions. These could be used to update your own knowledge and put in your personal development plan how the information will change your practice. Website: <http://www.nthivgumaudit.demon.co.uk/>

The information previously found on the Public Health Laboratory Service website is now available on the Health Protection Agency site. Other governmental publications are also available from this site. You will need Adobe Acrobat – the software for this can be downloaded via from this site if you have not done this already. Putting 'STI' into the search facility brings up many reports and the most recently collated statistics. Website: <http://www.hpa.org.uk/infections/default.htm>

The International Herpes Alliance is a worldwide association of patient support

organisations and health professionals concerned about genital herpes. This website provides information about regional support groups, educational material, issues and events of interest to those with genital herpes. It has some excellent and clear descriptions (and optional pictures that might be too graphic for some) together with advice on management. A section on testing talks about the limitations of investigations and explains what false-negatives, sensitivity and specificity, and so on mean. It is sponsored by pharmaceutical companies but does not appear to contain any overt promotional messages even in the section on treatment. Website: <http://www.herpessalliance.org/>

Another webpage with many links is the home page for the Genitourinary Nurses Association (GUNA), a UK membership association for nurses working in the field of GUM. A useful and topical news section brings readers up-to-date with recent press releases, advances, and so on. Again (illustrating how fast Internet sites change) some of the links are not functional. Website: http://www.guna.org.uk/Useful_links.htm

If you want to know more about the screening programme for chlamydia you can consult a site hosted by Bristol University (<http://www.chlamydia.ac.uk/>) or consult the text-heavy Department of Health website (<http://www.dh.gov.uk>).

The Scottish Intercollegiate Guideline Network (SIGN) has useful guidelines on the management of genital chlamydial infection. Website: <http://www.sign.ac.uk>

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Clinical updating

Major pharmaceutical companies often have the resources to provide a free professional educational service. The website at <http://www.orgyn.com> is a well-conceived and well-implemented strategy designed as an online resource for clinical information in obstetrics and gynaecology, supported by an educational grant from Organon. Although it claims to be global in perspective, the slant towards the Western world is inevitable.

The home page is flashy with colourful illustrations and rolling headlines giving an overall view of the services available. Medical news is provided on a daily and weekly basis. The web magazine ('webzine') is issued fortnightly and provides a roundup of the topical issues. Feedback from the readers in deciding the content of these issues encourages active participation. Registration is free to health professionals.

This site has appeal for obstetricians and gynaecologists at all career stages. The Exam Master is a web-based medical educational software product designed to assist students in their examination preparations. The Healthlink Online Resources, providing access to dynamic data sources, is likely to be useful for researchers. Access to more than 25 reputed journals in the field is invaluable to practitioners to assist them in keeping abreast of developments in their chosen field. Academic professionals would appreciate the links to societies and research organisations throughout the world. Busy clinicians would benefit from the ready and quick reference to Churchill's *Pocketbook of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*. The archives provide an extensive review of recently published articles in several journals. The commentaries put the findings into context and highlight their practical implications. The direct links to PubMed (MEDLINE) and the *British National Formulary* are a credit to the site. Personalised services include e-mail alerts, daily news headlines and notification of conferences, if wanted by the user.

All in all, this site is recommended for professionals involved in the care of women but

may be biased towards Western technological solutions.

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Chlamydia websites

With the recent launch of the second phase of chlamydia screening by the Department of Health (DoH), it seems appropriate to review a few websites on chlamydia.

<http://www.chlamydiae.com> is an excellent website for both the public and professionals. The website is authored and reviewed by well-renowned experts in the field. There are three major sections (1) a systematic tour, which encompasses the A-Z of chlamydia, (2) a FAQ section, for anxious and worried clients and (3) 'about chlamydia'. The salient features are presented in boxes for quick reference. The punchy cartoons and the vivid illustrations liven up the website. The multilingual information and the feedback at the bottom of each page are likely to improve the user-friendliness of the website.

The website of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases at <http://www.niaid.nih.gov/factsheets/stdclam.htm> presents the information as a 'question and answer' session in a fact sheet. It opens with a mention of the high prevalence and asymptomatic nature of the infection and goes on to describe its clinical manifestations and management. Limiting the number of sexual partners has a significant role in the prevention of chlamydial infection. However, this fails to get a mention. Recent advances about vaccine development and topical microbicides are good additions and useful links are also provided.

Health Promotion of England's website at <http://www.hpe.org.uk> is linked to the DoH website <http://dh.gov.uk>, which although it has detailed information on the health policies, could do well to have some information for the public on chlamydia. The other link to <http://www.playingsafely.co.uk> has a brief review of the signs and symptoms, transmission, diagnosis and treatment, and the long-term effects of chlamydial infection. The same information is duplicated in a fact sheet.

<http://www.netdoctor.co.uk> presents a general practitioner's view of chlamydial infection. Information for both men and women are presented alongside each other, making the client aware of the possible implications for the partner. Whilst the complication of sterility in women is underplayed, ectopic pregnancy and pelvic pain get no mention at all.

A critical analysis of the screening programmes for chlamydia is provided at <http://www.jr2ox.ac.uk/bandolier>. The authors acknowledge that screening programmes are complex and that their implementation must be preceded by exhaustive thought and testing. Although the screening strategies examined are mostly in a North American setting, the results are very likely to be relevant to UK practice.

<http://www.chlamydia.ac.uk> is a website exclusively dedicated to ClaSS: chlamydial screening studies. ClaSS is a multicentre, NHS-funded, Health Technology Assessment (HTA) commissioned, 2-year project that aims to find how a chlamydial screening programme might be cost-effectively designed, implemented and evaluated. The press release summarises the main features of the project. The six arms of the study are dealt with in great detail with meticulous attention to all factors. The website, which provides a lucid overview of the ramifications of the screening programme, is likely to appeal to our colleagues in public health and microbiology.

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