WEBSITE REVIEWS

Websites for information on sexually transmitted infections

Other websites are available, notably 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 Genital Ulcer Disease (AGUD). 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 STF 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 of these new websites 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.ssaha.info/index.html

This website for the public has a North American slant, with links to relevant news resources 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 call! The main criticism is that none of the reference documents seem particularly recent. For example, the treatment guidelines link to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). If 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.bmj.com/journals/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.nthtramp.com/memos

The information previously found on the Public Health Laboratory Service website is now available on the Health Protection Agency website. Other resources are also available, but you 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 PHE website has other 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 links 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 why 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 and is an excellent place to start. Website: http://www.herpespaliance.org/

Another webpage with many links is the homepage for the International Herpes Alliance (IHA). 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 contact 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.ac.uk 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 headings giving an overall view of the services available. Medical news is provided on a regular basis and each of the pages are categorised. 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. Academically, it is rich but the readers would appreciate if there were more 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 archive provides an extensive review of recently published articles in several journals. The comments put the findings into context and highlight the need for treatment and investigation. 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 headline, 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. Reviewed by P S Arunakumari, MD, MRCOG Specialist Registrar in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Rosie Maternity Hospital, Cambridge, UK

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.chlamydia.ac.uk 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 main sections: (1) information about the disease (encompassing 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 DoH website on chlamydia is authored and reviewed by well- renowned experts in the field. There are three main sections: (1) information about the disease (encompassing 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.

http://www.bashh.org offers a general practitioner’s view of chlamydial infection. Information for both men and women are presented alongside each other, making the clinician feel it is a necessary part of their job. There is 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 is apparently the best way to avoid chlamydial infection. However, this fails to get a mention. Recent advances about vaccine development and topical microbicides are also mentioned. The site is good and useful links are also provided.

Health Promotion of England’s website at http://www.hpe.org.uk is linked to the DoH website at http://www.dh.gov.uk. Although it contains a lot of 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 clinician feel it is a necessary part of their job. There is 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 is apparently the best way to avoid chlamydial infection. However, this fails to get a mention. Recent advances about vaccine development and topical microbicides are also mentioned. The site is good and useful links are also provided.

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