

Medical Information on the Internet

by Stacey Grace

Dot.com fever is raging and seems to be making an impact on every industry. Medicine is, most certainly, no exception. There are hundreds of medical websites that offer valuable information to the consumer. Unfortunately, the quality and complexity of this information varies widely, with offerings running the gamut from lay publications to the medical literature.

This highly variable medical information is presented in abundance. A search may present the "surfer" with hundreds of reference links or hits based on their find topic. Unfortunately, the user may not be able to discern how or why the search engine provides the information in the given order (i.e., by percentage use of certain words, by the originating site, from metatags, or from human ordering). Accordingly, in order to locate the choice content, the user must tackle the daunting task of linking to each site brought up by the search engine and examine each entry.

Many an Internet user has expressed frustration in not being able to readily locate clear and targeted medical information. When recently searching a nationally prominent medical web site for "broken leg", 879 entries were returned for the user's review. Unfortunately, the specific topic was not even addressed in the top ten entries returned to the user that included osteoporosis, diabetes types 1 and 2, depression, prevention of leg pain. When a user visits a new Internet website—AnswerMed.com—and searches for "broken leg," 20 relevant entries are returned for the user's review. They consist of the most common fractures of the various bones in the leg. AnswerMed.com provides specific medical information responses to its users.

AnswerMed.com provides natural language definitions of 5,000 of the most common illnesses, injuries, and surgical procedures of working people. The website's content originates from Dr. Presley Reed's The Medical Disability Advisor. Its straightforward, easy-to-understand style, coupled with the way the information is segmented makes it ideal for distribution over the World Wide Web. The Medical Disability Advisor is researched and published by Reed Group, Ltd. and is utilized by more than 9,000 corporations, insurance carriers and healthcare companies. It is estimated that companies using this material are responsible for more than 70 million American workers.

Unlike other medical web sites, complex medical knowledge has been translated here and summarized into easy-to-understand descriptive explanations. Individuals can visit this educational website to gain a general understanding of a medical condition. Information includes how the condition is diagnosed and treated, possible complications, predicted outcomes for recovery, appropriate specialists for treatment or independent medical examination, and, when relevant, clear illustrations depicting common injuries and disease processes.

The Medical Disability Advisor complete reference also contains disability duration figures, but these figures are not accessible to individuals who visit AnswerMed.com. The objective of AnswerMed.com is to provide individuals with practical medical information that is consistent with the information used by employers, physicians and case managers. This is consistent with the worldwide movement to "empower" employees to manage their own work, health, and financial lives. Many employers are looking for such "informational tools".

Likewise, the medical information content at AnswerMed.com is valuable to practicing physicians for use as a patient education tool. In the future, the disability duration guidelines will be available to physicians from a password-protected page at AnswerMed.com. By understanding at the time of treatment or independent medical examination, the normal expectancy for recovery used by the employer, insurance company, (and now the patient), the physician can then, not only become an integral part of the return to work team, but save valuable time. The MDA is an exceedingly valuable and relevant tool for the employee as well as the treating physician.

Increasingly, employers are learning to rely upon ABIME physicians to provide independent medical examinations in order to address medical disability issues for employees. Likewise, employers are empowering employees to understand their own health issues and time away from work. In our experience, educated and informed employees make good decisions about medical disability matters. Reference tools are available for the employer, physician and employee to manage medical disability absences and related leaves while providing employee education, quality care and management of expectations. By using similar tools accepted as the industry standard, all parties have access to critical information that will ensure an employee's healthy return to work, equal treatment for all employees, and enhanced productivity. We invite you to visit AnswerMed.com today.

Reed Group, Ltd. offers medical disability products and service options to employers, physicians and employees. Two of these products include The Medical Disability Advisor guidelines and Answermed.com. The Medical Disability Advisor: Workplace Guidelines for Disability Duration (Third Edition) available in book or software formats, is the industry standard for disability duration guidelines.

ABIME Perspective, Spring 2000, American Board of Independent Medical Examiners Newsletter, Barrington, IL

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