



## Surfing the Net for health care help

When Jim Carroll and Rick Broadhead decided to add *Good Health Online: A Wellness Guide for Every Canadian* to their stable of Internet books, the experience was an eye-opener. "We were amazed by the amount of information available, even about obscure diseases," said Broadhead. "In fact, Jim had personal experience in this area because he went online in an attempt to do some self-diagnosis for a case of Bell's palsy."

Their research resulted in this 182-page book, the first attempt to highlight the amount of health care material available to Canadians via the Internet (Prentice Hall Canada Inc., Scarborough, Ont., 1997). The 2 writers are best known for their *Canadian Internet Handbook*, which has sold more than 300 000 copies since the first edition was published in 1994. *Good Health Online* and another new book, *Mutual Funds and RRSPs Online*, are attempts to develop niche markets. Carroll and Broadhead currently have 6 books in the marketplace.

"I expect that we will update the health care book but that will depend on how well it is received," said Broadhead. "It is different from our

### Cool site

[www.mco.edu/lib/instr/libinsta.html](http://www.mco.edu/lib/instr/libinsta.html)

Before sending your article to a medical journal, consult this site — *Instructions to Authors in the Health Sciences*. If you correct the oversights it points to, you may increase your odds of succeeding during the peer-review process, or you might learn that the article is really not appropriate for the journal you had in mind. The site provides links to the authors' instructions provided by hundreds of journals, including those published by the CMA. All links are to a primary source — the Web sites of the publisher or of the organization that has editorial responsibility for the journal. The site is produced by the Raymon H. Mulford Library at the Medical College of Ohio and is "continuously monitored and updated." A spot-check showed that this is true for journals published by the CMA that have Web sites and have recently made changes to their requirements for authors. An example are the new *CMAJ* instructions that were published in the Jan. 13, 1998, issue and entitled "Writing for *CMAJ*." This practical site has now been added to the "Elsewhere on the Net" section of *CMA Online's* Medical Writing Centre ([www.cma.ca/publications/mwc](http://www.cma.ca/publications/mwc)). — Ann Bolster, associate director, online and information services

book about the mutual fund industry, because obviously that one has to be updated annually."

Their book is a primer that not only discusses the main Canadian health care sites, such as *CMA Online* ([www.cma.ca](http://www.cma.ca)), but also provides strong *caveat emptor* warnings for Internet users seeking health care advice. Broadhead says there are hundreds of "problematic" Internet sites. These range from sites dealing with specific medical problems, which are actually sponsored by drug companies trying to sell their own products, to sites that peddle steroids. "From the patient's perspective, the Internet is empowering," said Broadhead, "but it also introduces risks." For instance, a drug that is safe for some patients may not be safe for all of them "and that is why you need your doctor."

"There is no doubt that the relationship between patient and doctor is changing because of the Internet,"

he added. "What it means is that many patients no longer consider the doctor the ultimate authority. This can be a good thing and a bad thing. Personally, I think the Internet has to be viewed as a supplemental resource — you have to know when and where to draw the line."

The easy-to-read book includes 10 tips on why to people should seek health information online. Tip number 1: "You should learn to cope in a world in which there are increasing demands on our health care system." There is also a list of the top-10 risks. Number 1? "You could misdiagnose your problem or use a Web site that makes a misdiagnosis." The book also provides generalized and specialized tips on finding information on line.

Broadhead thinks there was pent-up demand for the book, which was published in October 1997. "I think we hit the market at the right time." — Patrick Sullivan

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