Hospital Web Sites: Important Information and Communication Resource

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Posted on November 1, 2003 by Editor

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.01 The Hospital Web Site (return to index)

Will you be checking into a hospital soon? Or maybe you’re interested in learning more about a hospital near your home, just in case you have to make an unexpected visit there someday. Perhaps your physician refers his patients to one particular hospital, and you’d like to learn more about that facility.

More than likely, information by and about the hospital you are interested in can be found on the Internet. Today more than 2,000 hospitals through the United States have publicly accessible Web sites. You can use a search engine like Google to find a particular hospital’s Web site (if you know the name of the hospital), or you can access a Web portal such as HospitalWeb (http://adams.mgh.harvard.edu/hospitalwebusa.html) to search for a hospital Web site. HospitalWeb organizes hospital Web sites by state, so you can compare hospitals in your area, or research hospitals in other regions.

The time to do research about hospitals and hospital care is before you urgently need it. Hospital
Web sites generally provide comprehensive information about the hospital – so much of it, in fact, that one could spend hours exploring the different content areas. The information you can get from a hospital Web site is often more plentiful and detailed than what any one person could tell you over the phone. The variety of information is likely not to be found in any single print publication either. While Web research doesn’t necessarily take the place of asking questions of people in real time, it can greatly enhance the research process if one has the time and ability to properly navigate through the Web site.

The better informed you are about hospitals in your area, the more likely you will be able to make an informed judgment about where you should seek treatment. For example, if you are in an ambulance, are conscious and thinking clearly, and live in an area where there are multiple hospitals nearby, you may have the choice to direct the ambulance to a particular hospital. Paramedics will usually take you to the nearest hospital if there is only one nearby, but they may also take you to a hospital that is best equipped to deal with your particular medical condition if there are several hospitals to choose from. Or, if you are taken to one hospital, physicians there may recommend you be transferred, at some point, to another hospital for treatment. If you’re suffering from severe physical trauma such as third-degree burns, for example, one hospital may be preferred over another because of specialized procedures and facilities available there. Sick or injured children may be referred or transferred to a hospital known for its pediatrics program. Your knowledge of hospitals, especially those in your area, can help you understand these choices and provide input about your own care. (Of course, one’s health insurance policy often influences treatment options.)

Hospitals can vary in terms of their size, emergency rooms, reputation, specialty areas, management structure, affiliations, and in many other ways. Their Web sites are one way to compare different hospitals side by side. Some hospitals are huge entities, affiliated with a research university, and provide a full-range of medial and other services. Others are smaller community hospitals that offer limited treatment options and, perhaps, partner with other hospitals so they can offer a wider range of services.

.02 Examples (return to index)

The following list contains examples of the kinds of information you’d find on hospital Web site. Although these are based on a review of a large number of different hospital Web sites, the list is not exhaustive. Many hospitals are creative and unique in what they offer on their Web sites. Others are more basic and less extensive. Here are some of the more important pieces of information to look for:

1. About Us: A general description of the hospital, its mission and vision, origins, strengths, self-presentation, and so forth. The About Us statement is a good place to start when seeking general information about a hospital.
2. Directory of clinics, departments, physicians and other useful contact information.
3. Description of specialty areas (e.g., cardiac services, stroke and rehabilitation programs,
pediatrics, childbirth center, etc.) Clinic hours of operation.
5. Patient rights and responsibilities, privacy practices and other notices.
6. Special services (e.g., interpreter services, spiritual counseling, gift shop, pet or music therapy, etc.)
7. Description of In-patient services and Out-patient services.
8. Physician and other medical staff bios. “Staff spotlights.”
9. Photographs of hospital facilities, personnel and others.
11. How to prepare for your hospital visit.
12. Information about whether the hospital is affiliated with a university, a religious organization, government, or national health care organization. Is the hospital “for-profit” or “non-profit”? 
13. Link to articles or press releases about the hospital. Health advisories.
15. Link to hospital newsletters and other publications or marketing/advertising material such as clinic brochures or special procedures.
16. Employment and volunteer opportunities.
17. Patient stories and testimonials.
18. Information about the organization’s fundraising division, special fundraising events and ways to contribute.
19. Community classes, screenings and other educational programs.
20. Research conducted at the hospital, findings, opportunities to be part of research studies.

HospitalWeb [1] contains a comprehensive list of hospital Web sites in the United States. Although not every hospital Web site is listed there, it is ideal for comparing and contrasting a number of different hospitals (via their Web sites) from a single Web site.

.03 Case: Crisis Communication Tool (return to index)

Hospital Web sites can also be an important media and community relations tool. During times of crisis, such as a disaster or a high-profile criminal or celebrity case, the volume of media inquiries can easily overwhelm a hospital’s public relations personnel.

One way of dealing with these crisis inquiries is to create a dedicated home page on a hospital’s Web site to provide basic background information, press releases, updates, official statements, links to related Web sites (e.g., a county agency, law enforcement, public health information, etc.) and even photographs and other images that can be used for news stories. A recorded message on the public relations office’s phone system could direct journalists to this site. This will not resolve all the communication traffic problems but can alleviate a good part of it by reducing the high volume of repetitive questions. In all likelihood many journalists will still want to speak to a “real person.” This demand can be resolved through a press conference with recommendations to visit the special home page on the hospital’s Web site for more information and updates. This is also a more controlled way of releasing information, allowing the hospital to reveal only what it
feels comfortable discussing publicly and protecting patients’ privacy.

One example of a hospital Web site that was used to deal with overwhelming numbers of media inquiries occurred in October 1998, when the brutal beating of a 22-year-old University of Wyoming student named Matthew Shepard generated intense national media attention. The Poudre Valley Hospital in Fort Collins, Colorado, where Shepard was being treated (he eventually died from his injuries), was swamped with media inquiries. The hospital used its Web site and a call-in message system as sources of news and information about Shepard and directed the journalists and the public to use those services. The Web site received thousands of visitors. The hospital provided an e-mail address for people to write to Matthew Shepard and his family to express their thoughts. Press releases on the Web site provide regular, fairly detailed updates, including statements from the Shepard family. Matthew Shepard died on October 12. A press release by the hospital on October 23 said that information about Matthew Shepard on its Web site was accessed 650,000 times. The hospital’s Web hosting service said that number was an underestimation by about 25 percent, which means information was accessed more than 800,000 times. The Shepard family had received more than 15,000 e-mails. The hospital continued to use its Web site to update the media and public about Matthew Shepard (e.g., funeral plans, donations to a fund in his name, etc.) weeks after his death [2].

Conclusion (return to index)

While hospital Web sites can be an important and hefty source of news and information, they are not objective sources. Like any business, hospitals will put their best foot forward when presenting themselves on a public medium, such as the Web. Because the hospital controls the content on its own Web site, you are unlikely to find critical information about the hospital there. Hence, when researching hospitals, one should go a step further and examine more objective or neutral evaluations of a hospital’s quality. Looking up archived news articles about a hospital in the local newspaper can provide a different perspective on a hospital’s quality, revealing controversies and problems that a hospital Web site either ignored or discussed with its own particular “spin.”

Publications such as U.S. News and World Report and Consumer Reports occasionally evaluate hospital quality based on its own set of research criteria.

A number of Web sites provide hospital evaluations to the public, sometimes for free, and sometimes for a fee. Here are some that were listed in the January 2003 issue of Consumer Reports magazine, with the caveat that “the idea of hospital report cards is so new that there’s no standardized way of presenting the reports or agreement on what aspects of care should be measured” [3]. That said, here is the list:

Guide to Hospitals
Consumers’ Checkbook
Some government agencies also make hospital evaluations available on the Web. A state government Web site is a good place to start looking for these evaluations.

Going to a hospital for treatment is a serious episode in one’s life. Preparation and knowledge can make the experience more comfortable. Savvy consumers of health information should at least avail themselves of all the sources listed here when seeking information about hospitals. Hospital Web sites are a growing and useful component of health informatics [4].

.05 References (return to index)


[2] Information discussed here obtained from the Poudre Valley Hospital Web site archive of press releases during the time period in question and other news sources.


[4] For other columns related to health informatics, see:

“Health Information Online Abundant and Varied”

“Teaching Students About Cyberhealth Information”
http://bcis.pacificu.edu/journal/2003/01/kawamoto.php

“Older Adults and the Internet”
http://bcis.pacificu.edu/journal/2003/02/kawamoto.php
“Computer Technology in Health Care Settings”
http://bcis.pacificu.edu/journal/2003/04/kawamoto.php

“Privacy and Personal Health Information”
http://bcis.pacificu.edu/journal/2003/06/kawamoto.php

“Healthy Learning Can Be Fun: Digital Media and Health Education”
http://bcis.pacificu.edu/journal/2003/07/kawamoto.php

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[http://bcis.pacificu.edu/interface/?p=2887].

23 THOUGHTS ON “HOSPITAL WEB SITES: IMPORTANT INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION RESOURCE”

africa
on January 30, 2014 at 1:56 PM said:

your attendees and take pictures.

Lanita Winslett
on January 30, 2014 at 6:16 PM said:

Good

best carry on luggage
on January 31, 2014 at 11:11 AM said:

I was wondering if you ever thought of changing the layout of your blog? Its very well written; I love what you've got to say. But maybe you could a little more in the way of content so people could connect with it better. You've got an awful lot of text for only having 1 or two images. Maybe you could space it out better?
plotka
on February 1, 2014 at 1:56 AM said:

Attractive section of content. I just stumbled upon your site and in accession capital to assert that I get actually enjoyed account your blog posts. Any way I'll be subscribing for the augment and even I accomplishment you access consistently rapidly.

plotek
on February 1, 2014 at 3:53 AM said:

I believe other site proprietors must take in this website as an design really clean and good kind and design, in addition to the content. You are an expert in this topic!

best longboard brands
on February 3, 2014 at 1:40 PM said:

When someone writes an paragraph he/she maintains the image of a user in his/her brain that how a user can know it. So that’s why this post is outstdanding. Thanks!

best garbage disposal
on February 3, 2014 at 7:09 PM said:

Hey very interesting blog!

best vacuum for hardwood floors
on February 3, 2014 at 7:58 PM said:

Thank you for sharing your thoughts. I truly appreciate your efforts and I will be waiting for your further write ups thanks once again.
**best infrared grill**  
on **February 3, 2014 at 8:48 PM** said:

Useful information. Fortunate me I discovered your website accidentally, and I am surprised why this twist of fate didn’t happened in advance! I bookmarked it.

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**best espresso machine**  
on **February 3, 2014 at 9:36 PM** said:

I’ve learn some good stuff here. Definitely price bookmarking for revisiting. I surprise how so much attempt you place to create any such fantastic informative web site.

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**garment steamer reviews**  
on **February 3, 2014 at 9:43 PM** said:

I’m impressed, I must say. Seldom do I encounter a blog that’s both educative and entertaining, and let me tell you, you’ve hit the nail on the head. The problem is something that too few folks are speaking intelligently about. I’m very happy I stumbled across this during my hunt for something concerning this.

---

**band saw reviews**  
on **February 3, 2014 at 11:41 PM** said:

Good respond in return of this question with solid arguments and describing the whole thing regarding that.
**best table saw**
on *February 4, 2014 at 1:07 AM* said:

It is truly a great and helpful piece of info. I am glad that you shared this useful info with us. Please keep us up to date like this. Thanks for sharing.

---

**best humidifier**
on *February 4, 2014 at 2:26 AM* said:

Please let me know if you’re looking for a article writer for your site. You have some really good articles and I believe I would be a good asset. If you ever want to take some of the load off, I’d absolutely love to write some articles for your blog in exchange for a link back to mine. Please blast me an email if interested. Thanks!

---

**induction cooktop reviews**
on *February 4, 2014 at 3:07 AM* said:

I think that is one of the such a lot significant information for me. And i’m glad studying your article. But want to statement on few general issues, The site style is perfect, the articles is actually excellent : D. Just right job, cheers

---

**best exercise bike**
on *February 4, 2014 at 3:46 AM* said:

A fascinating discussion is definitely worth comment. There’s no doubt that that you should publish more about this issue, it might not be a taboo matter but usually people don’t speak about such subjects. To the next! All the best!!
jig saw reviews  
on February 4, 2014 at 4:24 AM said:

fantastic issues altogether, you just received a new reader. What could you suggest in regards to your publish that you simply made a few days ago? Any sure?

best home gym  
on February 4, 2014 at 5:01 AM said:

This design is incredible! You obviously know how to keep a reader amused. Between your wit and your videos, I was almost moved to start my own blog (well, almost…HaHa!) Excellent job. I really loved what you had to say, and more than that, how you presented it. Too cool!

nigeria entertainment news  
on February 4, 2014 at 10:41 AM said:

Incredible points. Outstanding arguments. Keep up the beneficial spirit.

robotic pool cleaner reviews  
on February 4, 2014 at 8:55 PM said:

Ahaa, its good conversation concerning this article at this place at this website, I have read all that, so at this time me also commenting at this place.

Nigeria social network  
on February 5, 2014 at 12:17 AM said:
I will immediately clutch your rss as I can not in finding your email subscription link or newsletter service.

Lindsay on February 5, 2014 at 3:58 AM said:

Whomever solves the puzzle first gets the Bitcoins. While Bit - Coin is an experimental system of currency transfer, and like every other monetary transfer system is subject to theft or fraud, Bit - Coin is working to ensure the safest possible, unaffiliated system of online monetary transfer. Find someone to trade cash for bitcoins in-person through a local directory.

best 7 seater suv 2013 australia on February 6, 2014 at 5:43 AM said:

You are not a professional car buyer or not very confident about choosing the right car, it would be better to take help from some car broker. Of course, it would be nice if everything went well and you did not have to walk out three times or spend hours haggling over the deal. Now you can select the best model with great price in front of your computer without any hassle.