BOOK REVIEWS


If there were ever a time when health sciences librarians needed help in identifying and providing access to consumer health information, the time is now. Alan Rees, a stalwart and trusted leader in this area, has once again served our profession well and has produced two excellent resources to help librarians in this challenging, and in some cases, brand new role.

As he states in the newest edition of the Consumer Health Information Source Book, consumer health information was considered fringe to our profession when he wrote the first edition in 1981 (p. vii). Many librarians could legitimately dismiss this area as not being a part of their role. The current health care environment has changed that, and today it is hard to imagine a medical librarian who does not have to think about consumer health information. In his introduction, Rees does an admirable job of succinctly describing the consumer-driven health care environment of the 1990s as well as the librarians' role in meeting the ever increasing demands for consumer health information.

The fourth edition, like its predecessors, has as its object providing a comprehensive and evaluative guide to consumer health information. It contains 3,500 sources including, but not limited to, popular books, magazines, pamphlets, clearinghouses, toll-free hotlines, and professional medical publica-
tions. New to this edition is the evaluation of several dozen CD-ROM products, online services, instant fax-based services, and consumer health software products. Rees states that more than 85% of the content of the fourth edition is new (p. vii).

The book's second chapter, with the seductive title, "Best Consumer Health Information Resources," includes books, magazines, newsletters, pamphlets, and electronic databases that Rees has identified as being of the highest merit and value. For the librarian wanting to build a core collection, or for the librarian who has no idea of what is out there or where to start, this chapter would point the way.

Chapters 3 through 8 are organized by format; that is, chapter 3 discusses clearinghouses, hotlines, and resource organizations; chapter 4 includes magazines and newsletters; chapter 5 covers supportive professional literature; and chapter 6 discusses computer-based consumer health information. The latter was fun to peruse because it contains a wide range of products—from those that are appropriate for library collections, such as the Health Reference Center and Health Index on InfoTrac to a product called Your Medical Records for Windows, which allows users to keep their own medical records and print them out in wallet-sized reports or to produce custom medical-legal documents, such as living wills. Several inexpensive CD-ROM products, including The Mayo Clinic Family Health Book (Interactive Edition) and The Family Doctor are also reviewed in this chapter. Chapters 7 and 8, containing books and pamphlets, respectively, make up almost two-thirds of the book, which would be expected. From 1,600 books examined, Rees selected 635, attempting to provide a representative collection covering a wide range of topics (p. ix). Chapter 8 includes 1,200 pamphlets. All of the materials included in these chapters are up-to-date, with the vast majority being published after 1990. The resources in these chapters are arranged by topic; for example, AIDS, osteoporosis, and plastic and cosmetic surgery.

The author, title, and subject indexes are thorough and easy to use, an essential component of consumer health information resources. The subject index provides more than one access point to the same subject. For example, "cholesterol in children" is found under both "cholesterol" and "children."

The Consumer Health Information Source Book belongs in all medical libraries, even those that do not own any of the previous editions. Medical librarianship is expanding to include health consumers as consumers of our services, and this book will be a valuable tool to anyone trying to meet those demands.

The publication of Consumer Health USA will meet the demands of health consumers in an innovative manner. Its purpose is to bring together in one convenient location 151 consumer health information documents currently available on topics of most concern to the general public (p. vii). Librarians know that the federal government is one of the most valuable sources of current and authoritative information. The National Institutes of Health and the Public Health Service each publish reams of documents that are of interest to health consumers. Librarians also know how frustratingly difficult it can be to try to get access to this vast body of literature. This is where the newest publication by Alan Rees provides a novel service to health consumers and the librarians helping them.

Rees has selected and compiled into one book the full-text of 151 health-related pamphlets and bro-
chures produced by federal agen-
Book reviews


Critical pathways, practice guidelines, practice parameters—these words are all too familiar to most medical librarians. Locating these resources can consume countless hours of valuable time. ECRI has made that task less grueling with Healthcare Standards.

As described in the foreword, this directory is very broad in scope, including references to policy statements, guidelines, resolutions, standards, consensus reports, technology assessment reports, state and federal regulations, and various other documents intended to guide appropriate health care delivery. These standards are issued by medical and professional societies, government agencies, and other health-related organizations (e.g., Rand Corporation, ECRI).

The directory is organized into five major sections. The first section includes a keyword index and a list of the keywords used. Under each keyword, the various standards are listed under the name of the issuing organization. If the standard was published in a periodical, the citation is given here; otherwise, the reader is referred to another section for additional information. The second section is a list of abbreviations of organizational names that were used in the keyword index.

The third section is the heart of the book. All standards, with the exception of state and federal regulations, are listed under the issuing organization according to the document type (e.g., policy statement, standards, technology assessment). The address, telephone number, and name of the chief official of the organization are given at the beginning of the entry. Prices are noted in some cases; however, in most cases the user is referred to the issuing organization for current costs. The fourth section lists state and federal regulations. Regulations are listed by subject within the appropriate geographic area.

The scope of organizations included is very broad, including American, British, Canadian, and Australian medical and professional societies, insurers, federal and state agencies, and a variety of other groups such as the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), World Health Organization (WHO), the Alzheimer’s Association, and other voluntary health organizations. The coverage is thorough, and the index is well done with appropriate cross referencing.

Of course, standards are constantly being revised, created, or withdrawn, and no monographic publication can be more than a snapshot of the field. To answer these concerns, ECRI offers a free updating service. By using the telephone numbers listed in the volume, subscribers can get updates on new or revised standards, price changes, withdrawn standards, or changes in organizational addresses or telephone numbers. Despite its hefty price, Healthcare Standards would be a valuable addition to any health sciences collection, particularly in a hospital library setting.

Health Industry QuickSource consists of three sections listing available CD-ROMs, online databases, and periodicals. The coverage seems to be very thorough, including both major and minor producers of CD-ROM and online databases and a comprehensive selec-