**BOOK REVIEWS**


Keeping up with the proliferation of electronic resources challenges all health sciences libraries. This title will be a welcome addition to the literature for many librarians as they attempt to identify and compare the options for purchasing or accessing these resources.

The *Key Guide to Electronic Resources: Health Sciences* is part of a new and growing series of guides published by Learned Information, which recently changed its name to “Information Today.” The editor, Lee Hancock, is well known to the health sciences community for his document, BITNET/Internet Health Science Resources, on which libraries have relied for locating Internet resources. It has evolved into The Medical List, co-authored with Gary Malet, M.D., and continues to be updated regularly [1].

The *Key Guide to Electronic Resources: Health Sciences* provides a concise, well-arranged source of factual information about commercial and free online resources. The first chapter on online databases comprises almost half of the book and is intended to provide “easy access to information in order to choose the database and vendor offering the most information at the best price” (p. 1). Arranged alphabetically, each database entry has a description that varies in length from a sentence to several paragraphs and includes details regarding the source, the scope of coverage, and special features that might be useful. All vendors and distributors of the database are listed according to the type of access they provide; that is, online, CD-ROM, or magnetic media. Price information includes hourly and record charges, subscription fees, and system requirements.

Hancock also provides details on language, geographic coverage, time span, frequency of updating, producer, and contact information.

The next two chapters provide similar information for CD-ROM and magnetic media resources, with the latter also including diskette products. For consistency, Hancock uses the title of the online database throughout the book with references in the index to the alternative titles that a CD-ROM or tape version might have. In both of these chapters, the reader is referred back to the online databases chapter for complete information if the product was already listed there. Some might find that this cross-referencing offsets the convenience of having these first three chapters arranged by format.

The remaining eight chapters deal with free online resources and comprise the last quarter of the book. Included here are bulletin boards, listservs, databases, FTP archives, electronic publications, Gophers, online public access catalogs, and a small “miscellaneous” chapter. An introduction to accessing and searching these types of resources is provided in the introduction to each of these chapters. Because only free sources are included here, the Online Journal of Current Clinical Trials is not found in the electronic publications chapter with other journals but is included with online databases in the first chapter.

This attempt to publish this type of information is admirable and should provide a small library without Internet access a concise overview of what was available at the time of publication. The warp speed of change means that a lot of these resources might not be available as cited here. The reference to Gopher as a “relative newcomer to the Internet” (p. 409) and the lack of any reference to the World Wide Web illustrate the difficulty of getting this information to market before it becomes dated.

An appendix lists vendor information, such as street addresses, phone numbers, and, in some cases, e-mail addresses. The book has two indexes, by subject and product name. Medical Subject Headings terminology is used in the subject index to cluster the products into more than sixty subject groups, which provides a helpful location tool. The title index has a handy page-number key so that the user can easily identify the chapter containing the product.

This book is reasonably priced and will be especially useful in small-to-medium-size libraries that lack more comprehensive tools. Libraries whose primary interest is commercial resources might want to compare it to *Health Industry Quicksource*, which is broader in scope but more than five times the price [2]. Large libraries that semi-annually purchase the much more expensive two-volume *Gale Directory of Databases* will continue to use it for more up-to-date information, but may find this title helpful for the convenience of format and subject searching [3]. It is difficult to recommend it as a guide to Internet resources, because this information is so quickly dated, and The Medical List is freely and easily available to anyone with Internet access.

In summary, the *Key Guide to Electronic Resources: Health Sciences* is recommended for libraries that need a quick guide to commercial products and an overview of Internet resources available at the time of publication.

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**References**


Because health insurers are beginning to discover that nontraditional or alternative therapies save money [1], consumers are spending their dollars seeking alternative therapies [2], and conventionally trained U.S. physicians are incorporating alternative medical modalities into their everyday practice [3], it is inevitable that medical school and hospital libraries will be collecting more resources on alternative medicine. James Marti is the executive director of the Holistic Medical Research Foundation. His forward to The Alternative Health & Medicine Encyclopedia describes the above changes as a new direction for medicine: "While the old medical paradigm viewed the body basically as a machine, the new paradigm focuses on the interconnectedness of body, mind, emotions, social factors, and the environment in determining health status. Rather than relying on drugs and surgery, the new model utilizes natural, noninvasive techniques to promote health and healing" (p. xi).

The goal of The Alternative Health & Medicine Encyclopedia is to acquaint consumers and health practitioners with the major components of alternative health and medicine. The book is divided into twenty chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of numerous healing systems, such as acupuncture, ayurvedic medicine, chiropractic medicine, homeopathy, meditation, and yoga. Chapters 2 through 8 discuss maintaining health through nutrition, vitamins, minerals and trace elements, botanical medicines, exercise, strengthening the immune system, and coping with stress. Chapters 9 through 19 cover alternative therapies for specific disorders, which include stress-related disorders; drug abuse and addiction; mental health disorders; common male health problems; common female health problems; pregnancy, childbirth, and infant care; dental care; eye, ear, nose, and throat disorders; cancer; heart disorders; and aging. The final chapter is a discussion on the future of alternative medicine by the medical advisory board established for this book. Each chapter has a bibliography. The book contains a glossary, a general bibliography, and an extensive index.

Strengths of The Alternative Health & Medicine Encyclopedia include the arrangement of the chapters, the numerous tables throughout the text, and the bibliographies. Chapters are arranged in sections illustrating each disorder and a variety of healing techniques for a particular disease. For example, the chapter "Common Female Problems" contains a section on fibrocystic breast disease, which provides a definition and description of this disorder followed by a variety of treatments, including botanical medicines, hormone therapy, nutritional therapies, and vitamin and mineral therapies (p. 199–201). This format is followed throughout the text.

The book contains more than 110 useful and descriptive tables. Examples include choosing a botanical medicine, nutritional guidelines for relieving premenstrual syndrome, therapies for prostate enlargement, guidelines for choosing a holistic dentist, fighting food contamination, common sources of toxins in the home, and nutritional recommendations to increase the life span.

Bibliographies at the end of each chapter include extensive references to a variety of publications, organizations that may have been discussed in the chapter, and additional reading materials. This is beneficial in locating information on an alternative therapy that is not available in traditional medical resources.

A weakness of The Alternative Health & Medicine Encyclopedia is the attempt to cover all aspects of alternative healing techniques. This results in a source that may not provide enough depth and scope on the individual therapies and practices. For an introductory textbook on the topic of alternative medicine, the title word encyclopedia tends to be misleading and connotes comprehensiveness. The continually expanding array of alternative therapies and healing techniques makes in-depth coverage virtually impossible in 376 pages.

As medical schools integrate alternative therapies into their curricula, librarians will have to decide which alternative medicine and therapeutics texts to acquire. Natalie Kupferberg presents an acquisition analysis in "Alternative Medicine Goes Mainstream" [4]. She states, "in selecting materials, librarians should not be swayed by whether treatments have been proven effective but should collect works on both alternative and orthodox medicine so that consumers are given sufficient information to make a choice" [5]. The Alternative Health & Medicine Encyclopedia gives consumers a basic introduction to holistic health and alternative medicine. Medical and hospital libraries will want to complement this text with the Readers Guide to Alternative Health Methods [6] and Alternative Medicine: Expanding Medical Horizons [7] to facilitate informed choices.