



Nonprofit Organizations in Dermatology: A Helpful, Time-Saving Resource

As a practicing dermatologist and laser and dermatologic surgeon performing both medical and cosmetic procedures, I (J.L.F.) come across many patients who have numerous questions or points that they want me to clarify. Some patients come to their appointments with long lists of questions. Prior to performing cosmetic or medical procedures, we, as physicians, are obliged to provide patients with comprehensive information about these procedures.¹ We also must answer any questions patients may have concerning a diagnosis and its treatment and medications, as well as potential adverse effects. Although patient education is an absolute necessity, at times it is also very time consuming and draining.

Over the past decade, the Internet has become an invaluable tool for helping many patients find medical and cosmetic information. However, much of the information on the Internet

may not come from reputable sources. Many patients are unable to distinguish between reliable, trustworthy, authoritative sites and those that are not. For example, in a preliminary study of the term “acne treatment” that we conducted using 3 major search engines (Google, MSN, and Yahoo), we found that only 6% of the links were highly informative and tied to reputable nonprofit organizations. In contrast, 94% of the links were tied to for-profit organizations promoting such products as synthetic and herbal treatments (Table 1). Of those treatments, few, if any, in their current state are commonly recommended by dermatologists as first-line products for the treatment of acne (Table 2).

In the age of the Internet, nonprofit organizations serve an important role, providing reliable educational resources to the public.² Many well-established, highly reputable organizations in the field of dermatology, including the

American Academy of Dermatology, the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery, and The Skin Cancer Foundation, and many disease-specific organizations, such as the National Alopecia Areata Foundation, the National Psoriasis Foundation, and the Sturge-Weber Foundation, are at the forefront of making educational material available to the public (Table 3). These nonprofit organizations increase awareness of and provide important information about a variety of health conditions, thereby helping to remove misconceptions patients may have about these conditions. These organizations provide free educational materials and pamphlets available for purchase and help patients find physicians specializing in specific conditions. Most also have medical advisory boards that can respond to questions posed by patients. It is the hope of nonprofit organizations that by becoming more knowledgeable, patients will change their lifestyles to

TABLE 1

Results of Term “Acne Treatment” Utilizing Popular Internet Search Engines*

Search Engine	Search Results Page 1 From:			Total
	Nonprofit	For Profit	Sponsor Links	
Google	2 (AAD and NIH)	9	12	23
Yahoo	1 (AAD)	9	13	23
MSN	1 (AAD)	9	8	18
Total	4	27	33	64

*Search conducted on September 10, 2007. AAD indicates American Academy of Dermatology; NIH, National Institutes of Health.

lessen the risk or severity of their health conditions.

Although dermatologic information is available from a variety of sources, our patients felt it would be of great value if all of the most helpful and informative Web sites and materials were accessible from one site. With this in mind, the New Age Skin Research Foundation (NASRF), a new nonprofit organization [501(c)(3)] dedicated to dermatology education and research, has launched a free educational program available

at www.DrSkinInfo.org. Dermatologists can visit this Web site to create their own free practice Web sites in just 3 easy clicks. Dermatologists have a choice of either a free standard site, which includes practice information and a logo, or a low-cost customized site, where they can display their own audios and videos. Either type of Web site can be used by dermatologists to promote their practices and educate their patients. To date, more than 100 practice Web sites have been registered.

Patients can maintain complete confidentiality while enjoying free access to reliable dermatologic information in both English and Spanish, including more than 700 pages on virtually all medical and cosmetic skin conditions, treatments, and medications. This information has been found to reinforce and expand patient understanding of dermatologic conditions and their treatments. A personalized Web site can be promoted by adding its Web address to the backs of

TABLE 2

Sample Acne Treatments Sold by For-Profit Companies and Found on the First Page of Popular Search Engines

Google

Remove sugar from the diet and replace with superfoods that have a mix of ingredients, such as chlorella, spirulina, barley grass, and wheat grass

A skin care treatment using tea tree oil from the *Melaleuca* species of tree

A handheld machine that stimulates a heat-shock response to remove acne

Adjust acid-alkaline balance by eating foods such as green and red vegetables and all fruits

Vitamin B5 (pantothenic acid)

Eat a healthy diet limiting fats and oil

Bowel, kidney, liver, and heavy metal flushes

MSN

A heat-enabled acne treatment

A skin care treatment made of herbal ingredients to reduce internal heat by cooling the blood, decreasing toxins, and removing stasis; the ingredients are also meant to alleviate dampness and improve intestinal function (by removing toxins from the intestines)

Heal acne with natural olive oil

101E Acne Getaway, a traditional Chinese herbal treatment

Yahoo

Burt's Bees Herbal Blemish Stick

A skin care treatment made of dandelion, burdock, licorice, cayenne pepper, yellow dock, sarsaparilla, kelp, echinacea, and plantain

Parsley blemish stick

Break Out Organic Acne Gel

Acne facial bar containing olive, palm, coconut, hazelnut, karanja, castor, shea butter, manuka honey, distilled water, silk fibers, allantoin, and essential oil blend of *Litsea cubeba*, tea tree, and rosemary

business and patient appointment cards and to other promotional or educational materials, such as brochures or wound care instruction sheets. A free link can be built from a newly created practice Web site to the dermatologist's current Web site, if one exists, further promoting the practice and, more importantly, educating patients with reliable material.

Because of their heavy clinical obligations, many dermatologists feel that

they have inadequate time to devote to conducting their own research as well as inadequate access to have others conduct research for them. These hindrances make dermatologists unable to coordinate and participate in the data collection required by research projects. With this in mind, NASRF has developed a Clinician co-Mentoring Research Program, which enables dermatologists to do research without spending an inordinate amount of time

on it. NASRF's skin researchers, dermatology residents, medical students, and college students facilitate the testing of dermatologists' hypotheses and assist with their research. Over the past 2 years, NASRF's research activities have resulted in the publication or acceptance of 3 review articles and research studies and 4 case reports. An additional 5 manuscripts have been submitted for publication, and several research studies are ongoing.

TABLE 3

Useful Nonprofit Organizations in Dermatology*

Organization Name	Organization Web Site	Patient Resources	Professional Resources
AAD	www.aad.org	Articles available on various types of skin conditions along with images and links for more information. Special resource: skincarephysician.com	Professional education materials as well as brochures are available for purchase. Posters on primary prevention and early detection are available to educate patients on various skin conditions
ASDS	www.asds.net	Extensive information on various cosmetic procedures is available on their Web site	Professional education materials are available for purchase (eg, patient education pamphlets, DVDs)
NAAF	www.naaf.org	Advocates awareness on alopecia areata. Helps connect patients to support groups and helpful patient newsletters are available	Provides information on alopecia areata, detailing the symptoms and where to find help and a newsletter for afflicted patients' support
NCI	www.nci.nih.gov www.cancer.gov	Articles and information available on various types of cancer and their treatments	Recent news and research results on skin cancer are available
NIH	www.nih.gov	Various articles and recent news releases on a wide range of medical conditions	Contains links to various medical journals
National Psoriasis Foundation	www.psoriasis.org	Provides detailed information on psoriasis and treatments. Offers support groups and events	Professional education material about psoriasis is available for download or purchase
National Rosacea Society	www.rosacea.org	Provides information on and images of rosacea treatment and has helpful patient newsletters and brochures	Educational information including classification, grading, and clinical scorecard for rosacea. Educational materials on rosacea available for download or purchase

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TABLE 3 (CONTINUED)

Useful Nonprofit Organizations in Dermatology*

Organization Name	Organization Web Site	Patient Resources	Professional Resources
NASRF	www.newageskin.org www.DrSkinInfo.org	Provides free expert educational materials for patients, the general public, and health care professionals. Extensive information on various skin conditions, patient information pamphlets, dermatology drug fact sheets, research abstracts, quarterlies, self-tests, interactive materials, videos, etc. Provides feedback on skin disorder inquiries and searches for dermatologists in various locations	At www.DrSkinInfo.org , dermatologists are able to sign up and create a free personalized practice Web site with top dermatology resources and skin health information to share with patients. Resources consist of audios, videos, articles, and links compiled from reliable sources. Requires registration in 3 steps (less than 2 minutes) and resources of interest can be picked to build an effective free Web site for the practice. Dermatologists can collaborate and conduct research at NASRF through its Clinician co-Mentoring Research Program
SWF	www.sturge-weber.org	Provides information on various vascular disorders including port-wine stains, Sturge-Weber syndrome, and Klippel-Trenaunay syndrome	Educational information on various research findings is available for download. A brochure of medical events is also offered
The Skin Cancer Foundation	www.skincancer.org	Provides information and images on various types of skin cancer and prevention and helpful newsletters on melanoma and sun protection	Books, brochures, and posters on skin cancer, its prevention, and treatment are available for purchase

*AAD indicates American Academy of Dermatology; ASDS, American Society for Dermatologic Surgery; NAAF, National Alopecia Areata Foundation; NCI, National Cancer Institute; NIH, National Institutes of Health; NASRF, New Age Skin Research Foundation; SWF, Sturge-Weber Foundation.

In conclusion, there is an abundance of useful dermatologic information that has been made available to the public by authoritative nonprofit organizations. To access this information, patients can be directed to the Web sites of these organizations as well as to the Web sites set up by their dermatologists through the joint project developed by NASRF. Dermatologists are highly encouraged to use these

organizations to better educate their patients and save themselves valuable time.

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