



HEALTH AWARENESS

Understanding Health News

(NAPSA)—With so much news coming out about health these days, many people may feel a bit overwhelmed.

Fortunately, help may be at your fingertips. A new Web site, HealthNewsReview.org, is designed to support excellence in health and medical news reporting by grading stories on accuracy, balance and completeness.

“Health care consumers who use HealthNewsReview.org will learn how to look for evidence in any claim made by any source, including news stories,” said Professor Gary Schwitzer of the University of Minnesota School of Journalism and Mass Communication and publisher of the Web site. “Readers will become not only smarter consumers of health care but smarter consumers of news,” he added.

A team of impartial reviewers at the site assesses the quality of the health stories that run in the nation’s top 50 newspapers, the evening network newscasts, Associated Press wire services and weekly news magazines using a standardized rating system. The team includes medical and public health professionals, journalists and researchers. Funded by the nonprofit Foundation for Informed Medical Decision Making, the site does not provide medical advice—instead it helps readers decipher the often conflicting news about health claims.

“The Foundation for Informed Medical Decision Making believes that health care consumers should have access to the most timely, accurate and unbiased information when making medical decisions,” said Jack Fowler, president of the Foundation. “Since the media play such a significant role in how peo-



You can get a healthy dose of useful information from a new Web site designed to assess health reports.

ple obtain much of this information, HealthNewsReview.org is a natural extension of the Foundation’s mission.”

HealthNewsReview.org uses a star system to rate the stories based on different criteria, including: the novelty and availability of the idea; the existence of alternative options; costs of a treatment or procedure; sources of information in developing the story; and quantification of harms and benefits of a treatment or procedure.

The Web site provides information on a variety of topics, including breast cancer research, the latest on children’s vaccines and the value of PSA tests. The site only reviews news stories that make a therapeutic claim about specific treatments, procedures, vitamins, nutritional supplements and diagnostic and screening tests. Does Prozac treat anorexia? Will acupuncture cure hot flashes? Every day, the site looks at news stories and helps readers make sense of information that affects individuals and their friends and family.