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HEALTHNET NEWS

A newsletter for public librarians and others interested in consumer health information services

Volume XXIX Number 1

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NETNEWS

“A WEBSITE DESIGNED FOR GROWN-UPS”

A reliable health website especially for seniors....

Where should you direct older adults looking for authoritative health information?

Where can you help them find information that they can access... without having advanced computer skills or extensive medical knowledge?

The U.S. National Institutes of Health publishes a reliable consumer health website especially for seniors.

Now in its 10th year, the [NIHSeniorHealth](#) website provides up-to-date information on a variety of health topics as well as more than 150 brief videos about medical conditions.

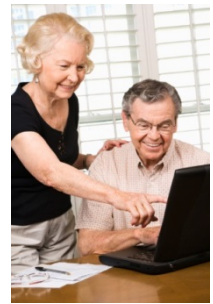
The NIHSeniorHealth website focuses on providing authoritative health information to older adults in “plain language.”

The website was developed by the National Institute on Aging (NIA) and the National Library of Medicine, components of the National Institutes of Health.

The NIHSeniorHealth website includes information about more than 60 health topics of special interest to seniors, such as low vision, Medicare Basics, eating well as you grow older, shingles, sleep and aging, balance problems, creating a family health history, and older drivers.

The website articles are organized by categories, including bones and joints, cancer, diseases and medical conditions, healthy aging, heart and lungs, memory and mental health, treatments and therapies, vision and hearing.

Among the newest health topics are “Healthy Eyes” from the National Eye Institute and “Complementary Health Approaches” from the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM).



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HEALTH CENTER

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The website has been redesigned to include new features.

The website search box retrieves webpages from the NIH Senior Health website and other websites that the NIH considers to be reliable sources, such as federal government agencies and non-profit health organizations. Its “senior-friendly format” allows users to increase the size of the font and change the contrast of the text.

Users may sign up online for weekly emails with “Healthy Aging Tips.”

Another senior health resource....

“**Growing Older: A Health-Related Resource Guide**” is a feature of the UConn Health Library’s consumer health website. **Healthnet: Connecticut Consumer Health Information Network**, a program of the UConn Health Library, publishes the Resource Guide, written especially for older adults and their families.

This Resource Guide includes links to websites about health insurance, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, communicating with a doctor, medications, aging research, long term care options, and end of life decisions.

EXPLAINING HEALTH INSURANCE TO TEENS

And you think the intricacies of health insurance are complicated for adults to understand?

Try explaining health insurance details to teenagers...



The **KidsHealth.org** website has resources to fill that information gap.

The online article **Health Insurance: Basics for Teens** offers clear answers to the questions: What exactly is Health Insurance? Do I really need it? How do I get it?

It explains forms of insurance such as Indemnity Plans and Managed Care Plans as well as specific types of Managed Care Plans: HMO (Health Maintenance Organization), POS (Point of Service), EPO (Exclusive Provider Organization).

An additional article: **Health Insurance: Cracking the Code for Teens** briefly defines insurance terms such as co-insurance, out-of-network provider, precertification, and “usual, customary, and reasonable” charges.

Finding Low Cost Medical Care for Teens....

Despite the requirement that all have health insurance, many individuals may be in need of care not covered by their insurance policy. This online article about Finding Low Cost Medical Care for Teens discusses additional options that teens have for obtaining low cost care.

The article discusses how to become “a Savvy Health-Care Shopper.”

It explains options such as Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), high school and college wellness centers, clinics (which may have a cost and require appointments), and teaching hospitals.

It includes suggestions for obtaining assistive devices such as wheelchairs and hearing aids, and finding specialty care.

It discusses opportunities for lowering prescription costs by requesting generic prescriptions, investigating “prescription assistance programs,” and comparing the prices of different pharmacies. The article emphasizes the importance of “becoming your own health advocate” as you mature.

The Kidshealth.org website also has suggestions for low cost mental health care for teens.

Finding Low Cost Mental Health Care For Teens

Among the possibilities for free or low-cost counseling are school counselors, local mental health centers and clinics, teaching hospitals, graduate student programs in psychology, and private therapists offering sliding fee scales.

The State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) offer free or reduced-fee medical insurance to children and adolescents not covered by insurance.

Crisis hotlines and suicide hotlines, hospital emergency rooms and local walk-in crisis centers provide emergency mental health counseling.

Kidshealth.org website...

The Kidshealth.org website, the sources of these articles, has sections for parents and children as well as teens. It covers a variety of topics related to growth and development, diseases, nutrition, emotions and behavior, school and family life, first aid and safety.

It is published by the non-profit Nemours Foundation's Center for Children's Health Media. Each article is reviewed by a pediatrician or other medical expert. The website is searchable. The content is available in Spanish as well as English.



Readers can select a “Listen” option for each online article that visually highlights words as it reads them aloud.

INSURANCE RESOURCES FOR MENTAL HEALTH THERAPY

Since two new federal laws now require health insurance companies to cover mental health and substance abuse treatment, many patients and families will be looking for resources and tools that will help assure that they will receive mental health insurance coverage that they are entitled to.

“The **Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act** requires insurance groups that offer coverage for mental health or substance use disorders to provide the same level of benefits that they do for general medical treatment.”

The federal government’s Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration also states that beginning in 2014, the “Affordable Care Act (ACA) ... will require all small group and individual market plans created before March 23, 2010 to comply with federal [mental health] parity requirements. “

“Qualified Health Plans offered through the Health Insurance Marketplaces in every state must include coverage for mental health and substance use disorders as one of the ten categories of Essential Health Benefits. “

A new web page from the Connecticut Insurance Department...

The Connecticut Insurance Department has gathered a variety of mental health insurance resources onto one webpage to make them easier for patients and families to locate.

Connecticut's Mental Health Parity webpage links to "free resources created by the Department [of Insurance] and information from federal agencies."

The webpage includes a document about "Frequently Asked Questions on Mental Health Parity" and "Rights under your Health Insurance Plan."

It answers questions such as:

"What types of health insurance policies and plans are required to provide mental health benefits under Connecticut's insurance laws and the ACA?"

"What benefits and protections must be provided in policies under Connecticut insurance laws?"

"What conditions would not qualify as mental and nervous conditions under Connecticut insurance laws?"

There is also a "Consumer's Guide to Appealing Health Insurance Denials" with details about your rights as a consumer if your coverage request is denied, how to appeal the denial to the insurance company, how to obtain free assistance in preparing an appeal, and how to extend your appeal beyond the insurance company ("External Review") if the insurance company refuses to reconsider their denial.

There is a link to an important Connecticut resource: **Consumer Toolkit For Navigating Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse Care Through Your Health Insurance Plan .**

The Toolkit helps patients and families understand what pre-planning and communication with your doctor is necessary, before treatment, to assure that they follow insurance coverage procedures.

More details about the features of the Toolkit appear on pages 2-3 of **Healthnet's Winter 2014 newsletter.**

The Insurance Department webpage links to helpful consumer resources such as the **Office of the HealthCare Advocate**, a free Connecticut government advocacy service about insurance coverage, and the **KidsMentalHealthInfo.com** website, a Connecticut-focused resource for parents in English and Spanish.

Mental Health Resources: A Guide for Patients and Families is available on the UCONN Health Library's website. It is published by **Healthnet: Connecticut Consumer Health Information Network** at the UCONN Health Library.

ARE YOU SEARCHING FOR A DISEASE SPECIALIST?

A search for a disease specialist can be especially challenging if the disease is a rare one.



Diseases considered to be "rare" are ones that affect fewer than 200,000 individuals in the United States.

The **Office of Rare Diseases Research** at the National Institutes of Health offers **recommendations for finding a disease specialist.**

These ideas include using the resources of a disease advocacy organization, searching published resources about diseases to find an article written by a disease expert, and searching the medical literature for journal articles written by a researcher who specializes in a specific disease.

Some resources.....

The **patient advocacy and support organizations** for specific diseases can be sources of specialists' names. The organization websites may offer a "Find a Physician" feature that can guide website users to practicing physicians who specialize in treating that disease.

For example, the Connecticut chapter of the American Parkinson Disease Association at 860-248-9200 will direct callers to Connecticut neurologists who are Movement Disorder Specialists.

The website of the non-profit organization **NORD (National Organization for Rare Diseases)** has a **Patient Organizations Database**.

Some national patient advocacy associations have a medical advisory board. The physicians on the board are likely to be disease specialists.

The **Genetic and Rare Diseases Information Center (GARD)**, a component of the Office of Rare Diseases Research, includes a searchable database of information about rare (and some familiar diseases).

The GARD Information Center includes unfamiliar disease names such as Pallister-Hall disease, Cysticercosis, Takayasu arteritis, and more familiar ones such as retinitis pigmentosa and Parkinson's disease.

Each disease entry offers both basic and in-depth information about the medical condition.

The website publishes questions from the public about a specific disease and responses from specialists. The dates of the responses are included; however, the specialists are not identified.

The disease entries in the GARD Information Center incorporate links to disease-related organizations, a possible source of specialists' names. Each disease entry includes contact information for "Organizations Supporting This Disease."

The in-depth information usually includes links to citations and abstracts/summaries of medical journal articles in the National Library of Medicine's PubMed database of medical journal articles. The researchers who publish articles about a specific disease are specialists in that disorder. The article usually includes the researchers' affiliation with a medical center or a research institute.

The GARD Information Center, however, does not provide referrals to disease specialists.

The **Directories page of the MedlinePlus website** from the National Library of Medicine offers an opportunity to locate specialists from professional medical associations. The "Doctors and Dentists-- Specialists" section of the Directory web page links to numerous national medical professional associations. Among the organizations are the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery, the American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons, the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons, and the American Society for Surgery of the Hand.

GeneReviews is an online collection of descriptions of genetically-based diseases. Experts on the specific diseases write the descriptions. The article identifies the hospital or research institution of the author/expert. Each article concludes with contact information for disease-related organizations.

WHAT DOES THAT MEDICAL TERM MEAN?

Have you encountered an unfamiliar, technical medical term recently?

Would you appreciate a "plain language" translation of the term?

A **Plain Language Dictionary**, that may help you translate that term, appears on the website of the University of Michigan Taubman Health Sciences Library.

By using the Plain Language Dictionary's alphabetical drop-down menu, you can retrieve a common term that explains the medical word.



Virulent is translated as “strong, dangerous,” arrhythmia is an “irregular heartbeat, skipped heartbeat, heart problem,” vesicular means “blisters, small bumps on your skin,” and buccal means “side of mouth, inside cheek.”

The [MedlinePlus](#) website for health consumers offers an online tutorial about [“Understanding Medical Words”](#) which reads the explanatory text aloud (and can be muted). It acknowledges that “you and your doctor sometimes are speaking different languages” and that the same word may have different meaning to a physician and to a patient.

The tutorial explains word roots, medical prefixes and suffixes, and abbreviations. Using diagrams and cartoons, it explains how word parts can be combined to create complex medical terms. It offers definitions of commonly used abbreviations and acronyms such as b.id., CMV, EKG, and EEG.

The home page of the MedlinePlus website has a search box for a Merriam-Webster medical dictionary. The dictionary result reads the correct pronunciation aloud as well as defining the word.

The MedlinePlus website offers an array of easy-to-read health booklets on topics ranging from allergy, arthritis, hormones, insect bites, and stress, to traumatic brain injury.

A Resource Guide to [“Medical Information in Plain Language”](#) is available on the UCONN Health Library website.

The [Language of Medicine](#) section of the “Medical Information in Plain Language” Resource Guide links to a MedlinePlus page on medical term abbreviations and acronyms. [What Your Doctor is Saying](#) from the Intellihealth website offers statistics, medical test results, words in your medical record, medication names, and other complicated matters...explained so that you can understand them.

[Deciphering Medspeak](#) is a series of online booklets to help make clear the words that doctors use. It is published by the Medical Library Association, professional association of medical librarians.

[Dictionary of Cancer Terms](#) is an alphabetical guide to more than 7,000 cancer words, published by the National Cancer Institute.

There is a distinct need for clear explanations of medical terms.

Lack of health literacy among the American population is a major health problem.

Medical terms can be challenging for the majority of adults.

In this country “...only 12 per cent of English-speaking adults ...have proficient health literacy skills..”

That means that only 12 per cent of English-speaking adult patients are able to understand their doctor's instructions explaining when to take their hypertension or diabetes medication, what potentially dangerous symptoms to alert their doctor to, or how to administer a newly prescribed medication.

Lack of health literacy, that is, difficulty in comprehending and utilizing health information... is a challenge that affects people of all ages, races, incomes, and education levels. This problem is especially prevalent among older people and among patients who have the most diseases and the fewest resources.

RECIPES FOR CHILDREN WITH CELIAC DISEASE ...AND OTHER ILLNESSES



Is your child on a gluten-free diet?

If your child is diagnosed with celiac disease or another chronic illness that requires modifications in your child's diet, you may be looking for sources of dietary information and recipes that are "kid-friendly."

For people with celiac disease, eating foods containing gluten, a "protein found in wheat, rye and barley" leads to digestive symptoms and damage to the small intestine. According to the [American Academy of Family Doctors](#), "Gluten is poison to people with celiac disease."

The [kidshealth.org](#) website provides a [collection of recipes](#) especially for children with celiac disease. These recipes omit all forms of gluten. They have been created to be uncomplicated and appeal to children. Among the dishes are quesadillas, "berry good popsicles," and raspberry cheesecake squares.

The website also offers recipes for children with diabetes, lactose intolerance, and cystic fibrosis.

In order to control their blood sugar level, children with diabetes may need to regulate "the amount of carbohydrates they eat." A section of the [kidshealth.org website](#), especially for parents, explains carbohydrate consumption and diabetes and the need to "balance [carbohydrates] with medications and exercise."

Recipes for children with diabetes include nutty chocolate chip cookies, tomato basil pizza snack, and strawberry cheese tart.

Recipes for children who are lactose intolerant omit dairy products.

Among these dairy-free recipes are vegetarian chili, which includes dairy-free soy cheddar cheese, chicken with beans and rice, and strawberry smoothie, which has vanilla soy yoghurt as an ingredient.

There are a variety of recipes for children with cystic fibrosis who "may need additional calories to meet their [nutritional needs](#)."

Cystic fibrosis affects both the digestive and respiratory systems. Thick mucus in the lungs, caused by a disruption in the function of epithelial cells, inhibits the normal absorption of nutrients.

Parents need to provide children with cystic fibrosis with sources of calcium, essential fatty acids, iron, fat-soluble vitamins, salt, and zinc, as well as additional calories. [kidshealth.org website](#) offers suggestions for increasing calorie intake without compromising nutrition.

In addition, the [kidshealth.org](#) website includes recipes for pregnant and breastfeeding women.

[Kidshealth.org](#) is an online publication of the nonprofit Nemours Foundation, part of the Nemours Center for Children's Health Media.

Each article is reviewed by pediatricians and other physicians. The articles are reviewed periodically to be sure that they are up-to-date.

Another resource....

The [Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics](#), national professional association of dietitians, has additional suggestions for nutritious ways to feed children with diabetes and celiac disease.



FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

The following titles are recommended to public libraries and other libraries providing consumer health information services.

Choosing Therapy. A Guide to Getting What You Need. Ilyana Romanovsky. Rowman & Littlefield, 2014. 169 p. (ISBN 978-1-4422-2543-5).

Deciding to seek help for depression, anxiety, or another emotional problem can be a difficult decision.

“More than one third of adults with major depressive episode did not talk to a [mental health] professional,” according to a 2008-2012 [survey](#) conducted by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

When an individual reaches the decision to search for a psychotherapist, there are more steps and choices ahead.

Selecting a compatible, effective psychotherapist is one of these significant challenges.

Therapist Ilyana Romanovsky’s book **Choosing Therapy. A Guide to Getting What You Need** offers help.

Ms. Romanovsky is a marriage and family therapist intern who focuses on cognitive behavioral therapy. She currently practices in California.

Ms. Romanovsky devotes a beginning chapter to explanations of types of psychotherapy including psychoanalysis, Adlerian psychotherapy, existential psychotherapy, person-centered psychotherapy (Rogerian theory), Gestalt counseling, and cognitive-behavioral therapy.

Each description includes a hypothetical dialogue between a therapist and a patient that illustrates that type of therapy.

Her explanations do not favor one therapy type over another. She believes that the skill and commitment of the therapist to a specific therapy are important factors in determining effectiveness.

She offers specific questions to ask oneself during the process of selecting a type of therapy and a therapist. She suggests considering, “Do I want an active therapist or a passive one?” “Do I want to be doing extra work outside the sessions?”

She suggests questions to ask of a therapist you are considering, such as “How do you stay current in the latest research?” “Do you receive personal psychotherapy services?” “How do you measure outcomes data and how will our work together be evaluated on a regular basis?”

Ms. Romanovsky firmly believes that your therapist should also be engaged in his own psychotherapy and that he should be tracking the outcomes of your ongoing therapy with your participation and feedback.

The therapy you receive should be based on scientific evidence that proves its effectiveness.

In addition, “a therapeutic bond [must be established] between a client and therapist.(p. 82)

Additional resource...

Healthnet’s website includes a [Resource Guide about Mental Health](#) with sections about Diagnosing Mental Illness, Finding a Therapist, Therapy Guidelines, and News about Mental Health Research.

Living Safely, Aging Well. A Guide to Preventing Injuries at Home. Dorothy A. Drago. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. 204 p. (ISBN 978-1-4422-2182-6).

Are you concerned about an aging family member?

Is it safe for your elderly aunt or parent to remain in their own home?

What about the scorched fry pan you noticed in your mother's sink...Was there a small fire before your visit?

Should your elderly father still be driving?

What steps can you take to help older family members make their homes safer and prevent falls and injuries?

Falls can have serious consequences. There is a "good chance that [an older] person's quality of life will be severely diminished" (p. 17) following a fall.

Author Dorothy A. Drago, a specialist in consumer product safety, and a former senior analyst for the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, provides practical details that will help create a safer home environment. Changes to the home environment can make a significant difference in an older person's wellbeing since "more falls happen in the home than anywhere else." (p. 18)

Many of her suggestions involve becoming alert to potential dangers and making inexpensive changes in the home so that a home is [not] "an obstacle course. "

Ms. Drago describes the physical changes in vision, hearing, balance, smell and taste, as well as the cognitive changes, as a person ages, that affect the likelihood of falls.

Her safety recommendations address "lifestyle choices" that affect the "whole person" as well. These include nutritious meals, exercise, seeing a doctor when ill, "keeping strong social ties," and continuing to be engaged intellectually.

She provides helpful questions for assessing a person's safe driving ability, including specific screening tests available, and suggestions for diplomatic ways to ease an elderly person out of the role of driver.

The book is often very practical. There are instructions, with illustrations, of how to get up safely if one falls. There is information about types of clothing that minimize falls...how to prevent specific dangers from burns and fires...how to avert medication poisoning, avoid carbon monoxide poisoning, and be wary of the dangers of food poisoning..

The National Poison Control Hotline at 1-800-222-1222 is an around-the-clock resource if poisonings do occur. The Connecticut Poison Control Center offer [poison prevention tips especially for older adults](#).

An essential part of maintaining a safe and healthy lifestyle is effective communication with one's doctor. An older adult needs to understand her doctor's instructions and be able to ask the doctor important questions.

A health literate adult can understand her doctor's explanations. Many older adults are among the 40 per cent of the people in the United States whose health is impeded by low health literacy.

The book guides older adults in asking questions of her doctor. It includes important questions to ask about a new medication (pp. 156-157) such as "When should I stop taking the medicine? Should I take the medicine with food or without? How many times a day should I take it?" and three very important questions to ask a doctor or pharmacist at each encounter. (p. 151) from the [National Patient Safety Foundation](#) .

Other resources.....

The Mayo Clinic consumer health website provides guidance on “[Fall prevention: simple tips to prevent falls](#)”

The UConn Health Library’s [Growing Older Resource Guide](#) links to resources on “maintaining a healthy lifestyle.”

The [NIHSeniorHealth](#) website has a section on Healthy Aging. It is described in this newsletter issue on page 1.

Keeping Your Child Out of the Emergency Room. A Guide to Childhood Injuries and Illnesses. Christopher M. Johnson. Rowman and Littlefield, Publishers, 2014. 273 p. (ISBN 978-1-4422-2182-6). Also available in a Kindle edition.

When your child is complaining of pain and experiencing a high fever during the night, where do you turn for advice? Your pediatrician’s office closed hours ago. Is this situation serious enough to call the pediatrician’s emergency number? Or to travel to the nearest hospital Emergency Department?

Keeping Your Child Out of the Emergency Room. A Guide to Childhood Injuries and Illnesses is written to help parents in dilemmas such as these.



Although too lengthy for parents to read in the midst of an urgent or emergency situation, this Guide for parents would be a helpful book to read *before* it is urgently needed, at a time when everyone in the family is in good health.

Using many hypothetical situations that illustrate situations of varying degrees of severity, the book offers advice on which option is best in specific situations. It directs parents to the appropriate steps to take in a potentially emergency situation.

The book provides guidance to parents about whether it is advisable to continue only “Watchful Waiting” to see if the situation worsens or improves, to call the child’s doctor for recommendations, to take your child to the Emergency Department at a nearby hospital, or, when, in extreme cases, parents should immediately call 911 rather than transport the child to Emergency Room herself.

Each chapter discusses a type of illness such as digestive problems, fever, breathing problems, headaches and convulsions, cuts, rashes, etc. The chapter concludes with a symptom checklist and action plan to help in deciding which of these care options to choose, depending on the child’s current condition.

Based on the encounters that emergency physicians face, the Guide teaches parents the rationale behind making important decisions when a child is ill or injured.. It helps parent learn “how to approach each situation asdoctors do” (page 6) and to learn “how we doctors think and make decisions.” (p. 43)

The author’s advice is based on real life experience. Dr. Christopher Johnson is an experienced Emergency Room physician who has been director of the Pediatric Critical Care Service at the Mayo Clinic, director of the pediatric intensive care unit at Mayo Eugenio Litta Children’s Hospital, and professor of pediatrics at Mayo Medical School.

Dr. Johnson provides insight into the Emergency Department scenario. .. He explains how emergency rooms work: that the person who first evaluates your child will probably not be a doctor and why you may be waiting a long time to see a doctor, or may not see a doctor at all. Care may be delivered by a midlevel healthcare provider such as a physician’s assistant or nurse practitioner.

Since many young patients are competing for the doctor’s attention, your child may have only a very brief time with the Emergency Department doctor.

He reminds parents “you will be meeting a health care provider who does not know your child” and “typically will not have any access to previous medical records [for your child].” “All he will know about your child is what you can tell him.” (p. 257). Therefore it is especially important to give the doctor details about the circumstances of how the injury or illness occurred.

He points out that the Emergency Room doctor may not be a specialist in pediatrics. If practical, he advises parents to bring their child to the emergency room of a specialized children’s hospital.

Other Resources...

An [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) website article explains “When to call your pediatrician.” It describes situations that require urgent care and those that require emergency care.

My Child is Sick! Expert Advice for Managing Common Illnesses and Injuries. (Barton D. Schmitt. American Academy of Pediatrics, 2011. 308 p. ISBN 978-1-58110-552-0) is a reference guide designed for panicked parents. It is useful for parents trying to make judgments about the severity of their child’s illness and the type of care needed immediately.

What To Do When Your Child Gets Sick. Easy to Read. Easy to Use. (Gloria Mayer and Ann Kuklierus. Da Capo Press, 2005. 534 p. ISBN 0-7382-1037-4. is written in plain language especially for parents. The book asks ..and answers...important questions about children's health problems: "What is it?" "What do I see?" "When do I call the doctor or the nurse?" "What else should I know about this medical problem?"

“Is it a Medical Emergency?” is a feature on the [kidshealth.org](#) website. It offers guidance to parents about determining: **“Should I go to the Emergency Room?”**

Another feature, **“Going to the Emergency Room”** discusses what to expect at the Emergency Room and how to prepare before going to the Emergency Room, e.g, documents and lists to bring if there is time.



*Healthnet News is written by Judith Kronick and Alberta Richetelle
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