Drug information sources

Adequate resources to obtain information and to evaluate the efficacy, safety, quality, and cost of a medicine are essential. This section provides basic information concerning well-known drug information sources.

Medical information sources include three categories:

 primary, secondary, and tertiary resources.

• Primary resources

Includes journal articles and unpublished studies that may be obtained from journals and services that provide the entire article

Advantage: represents the most complete information about a subject because all the data discussed in the article are available to the reader

Disadvantage: the reader must have skills to evaluate the article and the amount of time necessary to actually read and analyze it

 Eg. Of Primary resources

British Medical Journal (BMJ) , Lancet , American Journal of Health-System Pharmacy (AJHP)

• Secondary resources

Includes indexing and abstracting services that provide abbreviated reviews of articles; usually published in newsletters, CD-ROM databases, and online services

Advantage: readily accessible and easy-to-read information

Disadvantage: long period between publication and the republication in the newsletter or abstracting service

Eg. of Secondary resources   Medical Letter, Australian Prescriber , Journal Watch , MEDLINE/PUBMED abstracts , Cochrane Library abstracts and evaluations, International Pharmaceutical Abstracts ,International Society of Drug Bulletins

• Tertiary resources

Include published textbooks, which can be an excellent source of information if reputable and current sources are used

Advantage: readily accessible information and short time in reading and assimilating the information

Disadvantages: the lack of access to the original information sources, bias introduced by the writers of the text, and outdated information provided because of long delays in publishing a text

• Tertiary resources

Martindale: The Extra Pharmacopoeia ,British National Formulary , United States Pharmacopeia Dispensing Information (USP DI) Drug Information for the Health Care Professional ,American Hospital Formulary Service (AHFS)

• Internet resources MEDLINE—www.nlm.nih.gov

WHO—www.who.int

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—www.cdc.gov

U.S. National Institutes of Health—www.nih.gov

U.S. Food and Drug Administration—www.fda.com

Ideally, the hospital will have access to some kind of pharmaceutical information service to handle requests concerning the addition of new medicines to the formulary. If not, a pharmacist or a physician can provide the necessary evaluations given the time and at least some of the resources listed above. Pharmacists will find that, by using as many of the resources as possible, they will be able to provide the review in a comprehensive manner.

Using information from pharmaceutical companies requires the reader to exercise some caution. These companies may provide somewhat biased information. Many articles and documents may appear to provide usable information, but frequently the information presented is positive about the company's product.

Participants should note the phenomenal changes that are occurring in the pharmaceutical information resources on the Internet. Although this communication method may not be available to pharmacists or physicians in many parts of the world, it is something to establish if at all possible. The information sources on the Internet are virtually endless. The quality of medicine evaluation reports can improve and, with experience, the speed of providing an evaluation will also improve. The Internet can also provide very poor information, so it must be used with caution.