



Web Guide

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Iowa doctors: Read two Web sites and call me in the morning

DES MOINES (AP) — At least 150 Iowa doctors plan to start writing prescriptions — for Internet sites.

Dr. Donald Lindberg, director of the National Library of Medicine, said people who understand their health problems are much more likely to stick with treatments.

"Having a prescription doesn't do any good if you don't follow what it says," he said.

So doctors who agree to participate in the program will use special prescription pads to direct patients to the Internet under a program announced in Des Moines Monday.

Organizers said doctors are spending too much time correcting information their patients find on unreliable Web sites. They said the new program will help them send people directly to well-researched sites.

The pilot program is partly sponsored by the National Library of Medicine (www.medlineplus.gov), which has the largest collection of medical literature in the world. Participating doctors will give directions to library Web pages for hundreds of ailments and health issues.

In Iowa, 120 internal-medicine doctors have signed up for the program. Each will receive a customized prescription pad listing 10 federal Web sites about the health problems they most commonly treat. The physicians will check the sites they want patients to read.

If patients don't have home computers, they will be encouraged to visit a public library.

U.S. Sen. Tom Harkin, an Iowa Democrat who spoke at the announcement, said the federal government has an unequalled wealth of health information. He said the prescription pads are an inexpensive way to let citizens benefit from the collection.

"Iowans can reap the benefits of this program without spending a dime," he said.