

Question 8: Are there reliable sources of information that can be recommended? (See also Additional Resources)

There is no single information source for all diseases and treatments. To apply the principles in this book, readers may want to develop some skills themselves. For example, in addition to Chapters 6-8 in this book, the book *Smart Health Choices*⁵ gives some tips on how to find good information, and what to check for.

Of the websites available, few are largely based on systematic reviews. Some that are include the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (www.cochrane.org/cochrane-reviews), which has lay summaries, and the IQWiG website (in German, but also translated into English at www.informedhealthonline.org). In addition, there are many websites that generally provide good information but are not always based on systematic reviews of the best available evidence – for example, NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk) and PubMed Health (www.pubmed.gov/health) both provide high-quality information.

Of course, there is also a lot to be wary of. In particular, watch out for conflicts of interest, such as sites that might financially benefit from people believing the information or others that try to sell something. This can be hard to detect, however – for example, as we mentioned in Chapter 11, some patient groups have undeclared funding from pharmaceutical companies and that can taint the information provided.

Question 9: How should people avoid being 'labelled' with an 'illness' and getting unnecessary treatments?

Medicine has made amazing advances: vaccines and antibiotics for preventing and treating infections; joint replacements; cataract surgery; and treatment of childhood cancers, to name but a few. But that success encourages medicine to extend its reach to areas of less benefit. To a person with a hammer, the whole world looks like a nail; and to a doctor (or a drug company!) with a new treatment everything looks like an illness. For example, as better treatments for diabetes and high blood pressure have become available, the temptation is for doctors to suggest their use to patients with only slightly abnormal results. This dramatically increases the number of people labelled as