

The Asthma Explorers' Club

-- A review by G. D. Govias, B.Sc. B.Ed. CAI

In 2003, if you put the word asthma into a search engine, it would inform you that there were four million web sites on asthma. In 2005 the number jumped to 18 million and escalated to over 56 million by the fall of 2006. Since then the number of websites has been reduced but the sheer numbers make it difficult for a health care professional to determine what is worthwhile and what is not. One guideline is if the web site has been singled out for an award. The Web Marketing Association presented the 2007 Web Award for "Outstanding Achievement in Website Development" to The Asthma Explorers' Club website whose URL is www.asthmaclub.com.

There are a number of basic criteria to be used when evaluating a website: the target audience has to be clear; the information current; it should be user-friendly to navigate; and so on. The Asthma Explorer's Club, also called the Asthma-E Club, is targeted to children with a separate section geared for parents. Its innovative approach has four explorers – Laura, Brad, Sam and Tracy – who tell their stories and a few flash sections featuring youngsters who provide the peer approach to teaching about asthma. The latter is one of the best features of this web site.

Some other commendable features of this website are:

A Children's Section that currently includes peer education in the following areas:

- Activities – that change monthly
- an extremely well done section on 'Teach others about asthma'
- Medication Education that uses a good, simple and friendly approach as to why one should take medication for asthma
- Strike out allergens – dealing with pollens
- World Asthma Day – how to celebrate life, and ten ways to take control of asthma
- Safe Travels : Asthma doesn't take a vacation – has a list of helpful tips

The approach used is child-to-child, open, friendly, interactive and energetic. It appeals to youngsters both in design and format.

Word Power - a glossary of terms that provide simple explanations of commonly used words such as virus, mucus, plan, etc. It's extremely simple and easy to understand. One admirable aspect is that when new words are added, they are placed at the top of the list and under the headings 'new words'.

A Parents Page that includes

- a list of web links for further resources

- a section on peak flow monitoring that asks if it is right for the child, instructions, how to establish a personal best and provides information on the zones
- Ask a Doctor section that also provides statistics on asthma and information about travelling with a child with asthma. A number of subheadings within this section provide information on triggers, symptoms, coping, exercise, medications, monitoring and helpful hints
- Tools for School that contains letters for parents to download. These are letters for classroom and physical education teachers and school nurses. This section also asks parents to provide feedback as to how helpful the letters are.
- Smokers in the Family. This section has information and lists other resources for a family member who wants to quit smoking
- a Parents Survey to find out how the AsthmaE Club helped their child.

The information for parents is lucid and direct.

When reviewing the website, another interesting feature was “The Archive.” This interactive area contains a list of interesting topics such as Zone Defence, A Monstrous Adventure, Asthma Show and Tell, Give it Your Best Shot, Asthma Resolutions, Happy Holidays, A is for Asthma, Breathe Free, Outdoor Fun, Measure of Fun, Be Smart at School, Celebrate Safely, Ho Ho Holiday Safety, A New Resolution, and so on.

The website provides new educational material every month. There are adventures, activities, fun and games for parents to do with their child. Hence, it is not surprising that this is a web site that can be recommended. It is extremely well done.

The website is supported by the Child Dynamic Research and Charitable Foundation with an educational grant from sanofi-aventis and Altana Pharma. The Foundation is comprised of allergist/immunologists **Phillip Korenblat, MD FAAAAI** and **Gary Rachelefsky, MD FAAAAI**, and A/I allied health professional Melissa Korenblat-Hanin, ACSW LCSW. Congratulations to them for a website that is inspiring and a delight to recommend.