



Harris County Hospital District

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MEDIA RELEASE

Paging Dr. Yahoo, Dr. Google – The Dangers of Internet Self-Diagnosis

HOUSTON (April 23, 2007) – The high fever, the headache, the sore throat and the achy joints – it could be the flu. But the flu wouldn't account for that weird rash, would it?

Instead of calling a doctor, many people power up their computers, turn to a search engine, type in their symptoms, and hope for the best.

One Web site says a fever, headache, sore throat, aching joints and a rash could be either the measles, monkey pox or SARS; yet another site suggests Lyme disease or diphtheria. None of these conditions are good news, and the sufferer – in addition to being ill – now fears their imminent demise.

With the Internet, people have access to thousands of sites that claim to be able to diagnose them on the spot. But surfing the Web for an illness isn't the same as a genuine doctor's appointment and medical tests. A person can misdiagnose themselves with just a click of the mouse.

“People aren't doing themselves any favors by looking on the Internet,” said Dr. Yasmeen Quadri, medical director of the Harris County Hospital District's Casa de Amigos Health Center and assistant professor of family at community medicine at Baylor College of Medicine. “Their symptoms might match a particular illness, but there are several diagnoses that have similar symptoms.”

For example, symptoms such as achy joints and lack of appetite could be indicative of either a simple cold, or cancer.

Instead of running to the computer at the first signs of an illness, it's prudent to visit a real doctor for a diagnosis. Doctors are trained to take medical histories, assess symptoms and order tests to find out the accurate diagnosis. No search engine or any of the millions of Web sites can substitute for medical training.

The Harris County Hospital District is the public health care system for the nation's third most-populous county. It provides more than 1.1 million health care visits each year to uninsured and underinsured residents of Harris County. The hospital district operates Ben Taub General Hospital, Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital, Quentin Mease Community Hospital, 12 community health centers, a dental center, eight school-based clinics, 13 homeless shelter clinics and four mobile health units.

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