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<http://www.dipex.org>

DIPEX.org

DIPEX (Database of Personal Experiences of Health and Illness), a resource based on a qualitative research protocol, gathers information designed to reflect the entire range of patients' experiences as they go through diagnosis and treatment in common primary care settings.

Free access, no password

The site is mainly intended for patients and their friends and relatives. DIPEX focuses on situations frequently encountered in primary care, and gathers medical information designed to meet patients' real needs. Patients' reports are chosen to reflect the entire range of diagnostic and therapeutic experiences, as well as the repercussions of illness and medical procedures on daily life.

Produced by a social science research team hosted by Oxford University's Department of Primary Care, this multimedia database is also a useful resource for health care professionals. It is especially helpful for students, teachers, and all other health care professionals seeking to better understand and take into account their patients' viewpoints in order to improve both the technical and human aspects of their work.

The DIPEX site allows patients to share their personal experiences, offers practical medical information, provides support and decision aids for patients and their loved ones, and encourages better communication between patients and health care professionals.

Situations frequently encountered in primary care

In May 2005 the DIPEX website included patients' experiences on cancer (breast, cervical, ovarian, colon, lung, prostate and testicular), cardiovascular disorders (congenital malformations, coronary thrombosis, heart failure, arterial hypertension), psychiatric conditions (depression), neurological disorders (neuropathic pain, epilepsy), screening (antenatal, cervical),

and other common health concerns (dying, teenage sexuality, and caring for a relative who has dementia).

A standard layout

Each DIPEX module has an "Introduction" providing an overview of its contents.

The "Experiences" section makes it possible to examine the contents of the interviews (divided into major topics and subtopics - "Talking about"), or the full interviews ("Individuals"). Extracts from the interviews, organised by patient category and topic, can be read (transcriptions), listened to (audio files) or watched (video files). The "text" versions are particularly useful for visitors whose first language is not English, as some of the patients' regional accents can be hard to understand.

The question-and-answer section ("Q&As") lists questions that patients frequently ask. These were identified by DIPEX editors from the literature and the scores of interviews they have conducted. A brief answer is provided for each question.

The "Information" section provides general information on specific health problems, their diagnosis, and available treatments. Most of these texts are written by the DIPEX team, in collaboration with health organisations or scientific societies. The "Resources" section provides links to the websites of relevant institutions (patient groups, specialised medical societies, self-help groups, etc.) and to reliable references dealing with the relevant topic.

The glossary section ("Glossary") is particularly original: the definitions are not taken straight from the dictionary but from extracts of interviews, using a vocabulary in tune with patients' concerns.

The persons (DIPEX editors and members of the steering committee) and organisations (partners and funding sources) having contributed to each topic are listed in the "Credits" section.

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