Web Resources Can Aid Hospital Planning

BY THOMAS C. LAWRY

N ow is an extremely challenging time for hospitals trying to plan for the future. Changing reimbursement policies, shifting demographics, and evolving consumer expectations force hospital planners concerned with finances to aim at constantly moving targets.

Fortunately, a growing number of Internet resources make health service planning faster and more effective than ever before. Research that formerly took weeks—and multiple trips to the library or government offices—to complete can now be done with a few clicks of the mouse.

This column lists Web resources that should be in the files of every health care planner.

GENERAL RESOURCES

The following deal with general topics:

• Atlas of United States Mortality (http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/pubd/other/atlas/atlas.htm) This site provides select data, including maps, concerning the leading causes of death in various areas (described as "health service areas") of the United States. The data can be downloaded. The site is sponsored by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS).

• Births: Preliminary Data for 1999 (http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvs48_14.pdf) This site, sponsored by the NCHS, provides data on U.S. births, including aggregate numbers for birth rates and the health of newborns. Data are broken down according to state and race.

• Combined Health Information Database (http://www.chid.nih.gov/) This site brings together comprehensive databases produced by federal agencies concerned with health. The data include health promotion and education material and program descriptions not listed in other indexes. New records are added quarterly and listings are updated regularly. The site is sponsored by the National Institutes of Health.

• Data and Surveys from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ, for-

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merly the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research) (http://www.ahcpr.gov/data/) This site provides access to medical expenditure surveys, inpatient statistics, and information concerning medical diagnoses and procedures.

• Data Warehouse of the NCHS (http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/datawh.htm) This site, which contains a wealth of health care data, is an especially good source for information concerning disease, health status, hospitals, nursing homes, and ambulance services.

• Edgar Database (http://www.sec.gov/edgarhp.htm) The federal government requires for-profit health care organizations to file financial data with the sponsor of this site, the Securities and Exchange Commission. This site contains that information.

• FEDSTATS (http://www.fedstats.gov/) The U.S. Interagency Council on Statistical Policy sponsors this site, which provides access to data from 70 federal agencies.

• Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (http://www.ahcpr.gov/data/hcup/hcupnet.htm) This site provides access to a large amount of health care data as well as fast answers to users' questions about inpatient care. The data available—which include consumer ratings, clinical performance measures, guides to health care management programs, and statistics on hospital deaths—are largely compiled by the federal AHRQ in its 1996 Nationwide Inpatient Sample of the Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project.

• Health and Human Services Partner Gateway (http://www.hhs.gov/partner/) This site provides an easily navigable road map to Web links of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), including funding resources and HHS services for specific populations.

• Health Hippo (http://hippo.findlaw.com) This oddly named site offers a useful collection of health care–related policy statements and regulatory material.

• Health, United States: 2000 (http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/pubd/hus/hus.htm) This

NCHS site provides data that can help users track progress (or the lack of it) in Americans' health status, especially the status of women and adolescents.

• Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation Online (http://www.kff.org/) This site is a great source of health policy information, providing news on medical research, general health, AIDS/HIV, reproductive health, and managed care.

• HHS Strategic Plan 2001-2006 (http://aspe.hhs.gov/hhsplan/) For glimpses into the future of U.S. health care, take a look at this site, which reveals the issues HHS considers important. The plan includes sections on improving the quality of health care services and the health care "safety net" for the uninsured and underinsured.

• National Association of Insurance Commissioners (http://www.naic.org/) This site offers managed care news and white papers from one of the most influential groups in the insurance industry.

• NCHS (http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/) This HHS-sponsored site, which includes a search engine that can search 14 statistical databases simultaneously, should be especially useful to people interested in U.S. health care trends.

• National Health Care Expenditures Projections (http://www.hcfa.gov/stats/NHE-Proj/) This site, sponsored by the Health Care Financing Administration, estimates national health care spending for the years 1998-2008, with projections categorized according to the service provided (e.g., hospital, physician, nursing home) and funding source (e.g., private insurance, Medicare, Medicaid, out-of-pocket).

• AHRQ *Research Activities* (http://www.ahcpr.gov/research/resact.htm) This online newsletter provides a monthly summary of research findings from studies supported by the AHRQ, with up-to-date findings related to clinical decision making, outcomes, and health care delivery and quality.

• Social Statistics Briefing Room (http://www.whitehouse.gov/fsbr/ssbr.html) This site, maintained by various federal agencies, provides easy access to current federal social statistics, including health, education, crime, and general demographic statistics.

• Office of Minority Health (http://www.omhrc.gov/) This site belongs to the government agency responsible for collecting and distributing information on a wide variety of health topics. The site facilitates the exchange of information on minority health issues affecting American Indian, Alaskan Native, African American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Hispanic populations.

• U.S. Census Bureau (http://www.census.gov/) This site provides easy access to social, demographic, and economic information.

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• WebMedLit for Medical Economics (http://www.webmedlit.com/sources.html) This site, sponsored by the Web Medical Literature Service, searches 23 online medical journals for new articles pertaining to medical economics. It provides links directly to the original articles or abstracts at the publishers' web sites.

STATE, COUNTY, AND RURAL PLANNING RESOURCES

• Bureau of Primary Health Care State Profiles (http://www.bphc.hrsa.dhhs.gov/oear/sitepro.htm) This site maintains profiles of all the states from a primary care perspective and includes demographic and health status data as well as information about primary care coverage within a state.

• Community Health Status Indicators Project (http://www.communityhealth.hrsa.gov/) This site offers health data for all 3,082 counties in the United States. Each report offers information on a variety of topics such as population characteristics, leading causes of death, environmental health, vulnerable populations, and access to care. The reports can be downloaded in both printable and viewable formats. This site is sponsored by The Health Resources and Services Administration of HHS.

• StateSearch (http://www.nasire.org/stateSearch/) This site offers a well-organized topical clearinghouse of state government information available on the Internet and is sponsored by the National Association of State Information Resource Executives.

• National Rural Health Services Research Database (http://www.muskie.usm.maine.edu/rhsr/default.asp) This database, sponsored by the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy, details the funded rural health services research projects underway in the United States.

OLDER ADULT SERVICES

• AARP Research Center (http://www.research.aarp.org/) This site provides reference information, research results, and policy insights on a variety of topics about older adults and aging. Coverage includes senior health, long-term care, independent living, and demographics.

• Census Estimates of the Older Population by State (http://www.aoa.dhhs.gov/aoa/STATS/98pop/default.htm) This site provides the latest census estimates of the older population by state. Users may view population by five-year age groups, population by selected age groups, percent distribution by age group, and state rankings of selected age groups by numbers and percentages.

• Medicare (http://www.medicare.gov/) This site is the official U.S. government site for Medicare information. It includes managed care informa-

Extensive research can now be done with a few clicks of the mouse.

tion and databases to compare health plan rates.

• Older Americans 2000: Key Indicators of Well-Being (http://www.agingstats.gov/chartbook2000/default.htm) This site provides comprehensive information about the health and well-being of seniors. It features 31 indicators divided into five sections: population, economics, health status, health risks and behaviors, and health care. Information provided by the Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics.

• Trends in Health and Aging (http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/about/otheract/aging/trenddata.htm) This NCHS site contains information on trends in health-related behaviors, health status, health care utilization, and cost of care for the older population at the national and state level.

WOMEN'S AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

• America's Children 1999 (http://www.childstats.gov/ac1999/ac99.asp) This site serves as an annual compendia of statistical indicators on the health status of American children, including data and summaries of key issues affecting their health. The full report is available online, and the site is sponsored by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics.

• Health Concerns Across a Woman's Lifespan (http://www.cmwf.org/programs/women/ksc_whsurvey99_332.asp#preface) This report reviews the findings of a national, multiyear study on the status of women's health. Topics covered include overall health status, access to health insurance, violence against women, and health status of lower-income women, with solid data and charts. It is sponsored by the Commonwealth Fund, a private foundation that sup-

ports independent research on health and social issues.

• Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children and Youth (http://aspe.os.dhhs.gov/hsp/98trends/trends98.htm) HHS has placed online its third annual report on trends in the well-being of America's children and youth. Drawn from more than 90 indicators of well-being, the report is designed to provide policymakers, the media, and interested citizens an accessible overview of data on the condition of children in the United States.

CANCER SERVICES

• National Cancer Data Base (http://www.facs.org/about_college/acsdept/cancer_dept/programs/ncdb/whatsncdb.html) This site provides comprehensive cancer disease statistics by site. Information by cancer type includes patient demographics, treatment by stage, treatment by surgery type, and survival rates.

• Atlas of Cancer Mortality in the United States: 1950-94 (http://www.nci.nih.gov/atlas/) This online book from the National Cancer Institute provides maps, text, tables, and figures showing the geographic patterns of cancer death rates in the United States for approximately 40 cancers. The color-coded maps in the atlas make it easy for researchers and planners to identify places where high or low rates occur and to uncover patterns of cancer that might escape notice. □

CHAusa, the web site of the Catholic Health Association, provides a collection of Catholic/religious, government, and health-related links, with special focus on parish and long-term care. Go to http://www.chausa.org/OTHLINKS.ASP, as well as the "Advocacy" section of CHAusa.

Board members are usually willing and happy to take on strategic roles to improve their organization.

executives as professional volunteers who spend a few hours each month teaching, guiding, and advising on business and administrative strategies and techniques.

Mini-Medical School Ask board members to invite key leaders to your hospital to learn its inner workings both from the business and medical side. Participants can don surgical gowns for an inside look at an operation, go behind the scenes in the kitchen and supply areas, follow doctors and nurses on rounds, accompany the hospital chaplain during patient visits, and sit in on a management meeting.

Market Researchers Ask board members to participate in market research. This involvement can be as simple as surveying a dozen of their friends to identify gaps in the community's health offerings, answering questions on satisfaction with your organization's customer service, and learning your organization's strengths and weaknesses from a business and community perspective.

Board members can be a tremendous asset to your growth and success in an increasingly volatile environment. Ensuring that they are active participants in helping you reach your strategic goals is simple. Follow two words of advice from my mother: "just ask." □

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