Anorexia Nervosa Websites
Reviewed by Tyler Fortman

http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/

The National Eating Disorder Association sponsors this excellent resource targeting both anorexia and bulimia. The attractive web design of the site makes it easy to read and follow. The site is organized into an “About Us” section that describes the organization, the organization’s leadership, and provides a link for those interested in employment. The “Programs and Events” section provides a listing of the association’s future programming, which includes a national conference, opportunity for statewide advocacy groups to join the cause, links to educational programming designed for those with eating disorders, a program that monitors web based media on eating disorders, and a link to the STAR program (focused on eating disorder research collaboration). The “Information and Resources” section of the website appears to be the most beneficial. It outlines resources for women with eating disorders, men with eating disorders, family of those with eating disorders, and professionals who treat clients with eating disorders. The website also includes links to news articles related to eating disorders, research grant applications, and a development section.

The website’s comprehensiveness appears to be both its greatest strength and weakness. On one hand, the website does provide useful and accurate information about eating disorders to a broad array of people who are personally suffering from an eating disorder, indirectly affected by eating disorders, or involved with the treatment and research of eating disorders. It is useful that information about the disorders is categorized by gender because the disorders affect each gender differently. However the comprehensiveness of the website comes at a cost. Information is well organized, but because so much is available, patience would be required to find a specific type of information. Also, the section that is designed for practitioners is rather elementary and may give a clinician the impression that no further information is needed to be competent in treatment, when in fact further training would be essential. The site’s primary colors are green and white, which positively affects men with the disorder by avoiding the stigma that eating disorders only affect women. The most impressive component of the website is its 24-hour eating disorder hotline maintained by the site’s administrators and designed to find help for those in need.

http://www.something-fishy.org/default.php

Something fishy is a broad based website maintained by the CRC Health Group. The site is clearly designed for those suffering from eating disorders. It includes a toll free hotline and an online chat in which the person seeking help is referred to a clinician in the CRC network. The site contains a general information section with the DSM-IV-TR diagnostic criteria of anorexia, a signs of eating disorder section (complete with an online screening questionnaire), a prevention and causes section, a dangers section, tips for those who wish to support their loved ones suffering from anorexia, common
treatment summaries, a resources section, and a section designed to allow those with eating disorders and their loved ones to let their voices be heard.

This website provides excellent, reliable information about anorexia. Criteria are objective and the screening measure linked to the website appears to assess the diagnostic criteria for the disorder well. However, the measure does not include a reference to demonstrate its reliability and validity and enables the distorted cognitions of a person with the disorder to bias their responses, which could easily lead to a person who needs help not seeking treatment. The section designed to allow those affected by the disorder a voice is very powerful; it shows the danger of the disorder with a “in memory” wall where the names of those who have died from the disorder are listed. A section that is unique to this site compares aspects of culture in the presentation of and dangers surrounding disordered eating. Also, a section aimed at finding financial resources to fund treatment is useful. The site’s biggest flaw is a bias to recruit viewers to their treatment clinicians. Although treatment resources are important, the website takes on a sense that viewers are being sold a service instead of simply being provided information.

http://www.anorexiasurvivalguide.com/

Anorexiasurvivalguide.com may look very appealing to an uninformed internet user who is seeking information about anorexia. The site contains links for diagnostic criteria and information, treatment, effects of the disorder, and associated myths. It is clearly designed for people with the disorder who are seeking information. Upon quick observation it is clear based on the multitude of advertisements on the page that the site is maintained by a money seeking party.

The information on the site is not reliable although it may appear so to a novice. The anorexia diagnostic criteria provided are not based on the DSM. It discusses two of the criteria (refusal to maintain a normal body weight and intense fear of gaining weight), but fails to discuss distortions in the way a person with the disorder experiences his or her body. Amenorrhea is also listed as a symptom of the disorder, but not a diagnostic criterion. Furthermore, the site discusses “Activity Anorexia,” which it claims is a subtype of the disorder. Some information on the site is useful, such as the section on associated myths and the emphasis on seeking treatment. However, a non-clinician seeking more information on anorexia would not be able to distinguish between the correct, useful information provided and the worthless information. This site uses a life-threatening illness to gain advertising dollars at the expense of correct information sharing, it should be avoided.

http://www.freewebs.com/thinnest/whynotproana.htm

This website is a prime example of a “pro-ana” website, which could easily be found by a person searching the internet for information about anorexia nervosa. It is very, very challenging to find anything positive about the site. The site claims to create a network for those suffering from anorexia, who wish to “escape the hatred” of people saying that the disorder is not healthy. It also promotes continuation of unhealthy practices and encourages one to not change their behavior. The site contains sections such as “thinspirational quotes” and “thinspirational models,” both of which encourage
the continuation of disordered eating. A BMI calculator and suggested BMI’s that are well below the healthy range are suggested. The site is filled with pictures attempting to glamorize women who are suffering from anorexia. There is also a “distractions” section, which provides alternative activities to eating and a section designed to teach people how to hide their eating disorder. Finally, the home page includes a chat room.

This disgusting website capitalizes on the illnesses of those that frequent it. The numerous pictures of women who are far below a normal weight are referred to as though the women in them have normal, healthy bodies. Text on the page consistently sends threatening messages that if one does utilize a certain weight loss technique than he or she will become fat. This attitude exacerbates the fear of gaining weight, a diagnostic criterion of anorexia. The site’s general message is that it is a positive thing to have anorexia and all attempts should be to lose more weight, certainly not to treat the disorder. Even the website’s chat revolved around ways in which one woman could eliminate the calories that she ate for breakfast and lunch (two pieces of toast). The only positive component of the site was a message left in the address book in which someone asked the website’s creators to examine their views and recognize the hurt they are causing.

http://www.eatingwithyouranorexic.com/

Eatingwithyouranorexic.com is a complimentary website to the book that shares its name, Eating with Your Anorexic (Collins, 2005). Both are aimed at decreasing the guilt that families suffer when they wrongly believe that they have caused their child’s eating disorder. In this light, the website targets families of those suffering from eating disorders and includes a three minute film clip in which clinicians from a multitude of centers are filmed stating that parents do not cause eating disorders. Links are included on the site for an overview of the book, an option to purchase the book, and a discussion of the Mausley approach. In general, the site takes the approach that the cause of eating disorders is unknown – what it refers to as the “agnostic approach to eating disorders” – but does take the liberty of ruling out families as a potential cause. The site’s founder, a mother of a child with an eating disorder, also provides references for other books, a blog, and a link to her non-profit agency (FEAST).

Unfortunately, the site does not site any empirical research to support its claims. Many “expert” clinicians are consulted and quotes are provided, but almost no research is cited. A link is provided to a magazine article published by Scientific American; however, this does not provide primary sources of information. Due to this weakness, it is unclear if the information presented is valid or not. The site’s biggest strength is the acknowledgment and encouragement of families to be resources in their child’s treatment process. Overall, the site is not worthy of recommendation, but is not likely to cause further damage to the psychological health of those suffering with eating disorders or their families.