Empowering the Public through Web-based Health Information: Evaluation Results from BC
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Prepared by:
Judith Krajnak
Post Doctoral Fellow
Simon Fraser University

Document Contact:
Ellen Balka
School of Communication
Simon Fraser University
8888 University Drive
Burnaby, BC, Canada V5A 1S6
tel: +1.604.725.2756
e-mail: ellenb@sfu.ca
website: www.sfu.ca/act4hlth/
SFU Institutional Repository: http://ir.lib.sfu.ca/handle/1892/3701
Empowering the Public Through Web-based Health Information: Evaluation Results from BC

Judith Krajnak
Postdoctoral Fellow
ACTION for Health Project

Other authors include: Irv Rootman and Jeanne Legare

Web study results presented on behalf of the Quality Improvement of Literacy, Telecare and Self Help (QUILTS) Collaboration and the BC Ministry of Health

September 20, 2005 – Canadian Public Health Association
Overview

- Review findings from recent BC HealthGuide evaluation
- Policy implications to consider when designing web sites
- Lessons learned
The BC HealthGuide Program

BC HealthGuide Handbook

- 400 page handbook distributed free of charge to BC households (Spring 2001); French language version (2004); First Nation Handbook (2003)

BC HealthGuide HealthFiles

- 170 fact sheets

BC NurseLine (24/7 access to nurses)

- BC is one of 8 CDN jurisdictions providing services

BC HealthGuide Online (www.bchealthguide.org)

- 3,000 common health concerns, including tests, procedures and other resources
Health Information's Role in Primary Care Experience

- **Awareness**: Are residents aware of HealthGuide programs components?
  - How/when are program components used within continuum of care? Is the information accessible?
  - Are consumers satisfied?

- **Use / Satisfaction**: How do the components contribute to increased personal knowledge regarding health?

- **Knowledge**: How do the components affect decision-making?

- **Choices**: Does access to information affect patient/provider interaction?

- **Interactions**: Is satisfaction with provision of care increased?

- **Care**: What is the impact of the program on the utilization of services? In a broader sense, what is the impact on the health system?

Source: QUILTS evaluation framework report
BC HealthGuide Research Strategy (Web Site)

4-Prong Research Strategy

- Focus groups
  - Involved both English speakers/multi-lingual speakers
  - Who is using/not using?
  - Navigation patterns
  - Included physicians (both FP and ER)

- Population-based telephone survey
  - Gauge awareness

- Pop-up web survey
  - Develop profile of users

- Key informant interviews of health care professionals
  - Are they aware of web site?
  - How do they use it, compared to their use of the printed materials?
Who is Looking for Health Information Via the Web?

- BC has the highest level of Internet usage in the country
  - 71% of BC households were regular users (2003)
    - Up 23% from 1999

- Rates similar in
  - Alberta (69%)
  - Ontario (68%)

- Lowest rates were found in
  - New Brunswick (53%)
  - Quebec (66%)
Navigation on BC HealthGuide Online
Total document views to date: 28,507,231

Source: BC Ministry of Health, 2005
Focus Group Results

10 consumer groups held throughout the province

- Included both users of the program & non-users

- Navigation patterns
  - Majority use search engine (e.g., Google, MSN, Excite)
  - Web sites accessed included:
    - Ask Jeeves, Medline, Mayo Clinic, WebMD
    - Low awareness for BC HealthGuide, and government-sponsored web sites in general (about 1 in 10 were aware of the web site)

- Evaluation of information found
  - Using multiples sites
  - Using credible sites
Use of Information During Physician’s Visit

Does information affect an office visit?

- Physicians are “not happy”
  - Esp. “older physicians”

- Questions competency
  - Expected that the physician already knows the info

- Disincentive for physicians to support programs like the BC HealthGuide
  - Less business

- Consumer strategy – “hide” the written information, but bring up what they know in the conversation
Population-Based Telephone Survey Results

Findings related to the BC HealthGuide Online:

- Used by 4% of British Columbians in the last year
- Utilization highest among
  - Men
  - Younger persons (18-34)
  - Higher income households (over $30,000)
BC HealthGuide Program Component Awareness & Utilization

% BC Population

Source: QUILTS Evaluation Team, telephone survey, Jan 04
Geographic Distribution of Awareness/Usage of Web Site

Source: QUILTS Evaluation Team, telephone survey
Pop-up survey ran on web site from mid September 2004 through February 1, 2005

- 5,800 individuals were presented with survey
- Completed surveys = 2,927 (50% response rate)
- Convenience-based sampling as users of the site self-selected into our survey

User Profile

- 76% of respondents were female
- Most users (93.5%) were between 20 to 65 years old
  - Over 65+, more evenly divided by sex
With Respect to BC Population

Over- and Under-Representation among BCHG Online Users

Users over-represented on Vancouver Island and the North

Question is...what makes this so?

Source: QUILTS evaluation team, Web Survey
Percentages of Female and Male Respondents - by Age Group

Source: QUILTS evaluation team, Web Survey
About half of users (46%) had children under 19

14% of users were practicing health care professionals

87% had some college education or better
  - 39% had finished university

80% reported earnings of $30K or more

About 50% never visited site previously in the last 6 months
  - So... lots of new users. Question is will they return?
  - About 30% had visited between 1 to 3 times
  - 9% had visited 8 times +
Self-Reported Quality of Health By Web Site Users

Percentages of Self Rating of Health

Source: QUILTS evaluation team, Web Survey
Types of Health Information Sought

![Bar chart showing types of health information sought and their response counts.]

- Latest health news
- BC HealthGuide Program
- Wellness and disease prevention
- Pregnancy
- General mental health
- General physical health
- A specific health problem
- Alternative and complementary therapies
- Prescription drugs
- OTC or non-prescription drugs
- Medical or laboratory tests and x-rays
- Support groups
- Accessing health services
- Location of health services
- Other

Source: QUILTS evaluation team, Web Survey
List of Health Problems Searched...

- Abdominal pain
- Back pain
- Cancer
- Chest pain
- Chicken pox
- Flu
- Headache
- Heart problems
- Diabetes

42% of all responses
Satisfaction

- Younger users (10 – 19y) least satisfied
- Only 63% of this age group liked the site design

Source: QUILTS evaluation team, Web Survey
Policy Implications

Recognize that the Internet is not a substitute for other forms of information for all populations

- Investment in other forms of information delivery aimed at less educated, less affluent Canadians, and those with literacy barriers, is essential to universal, equitable health care.

- Targeting seniors via the web continues to be a challenge

- Rural/remote access, while there in theory, still is a challenge
  - Computer sites in libraries are often very busy
  - Little privacy
  - Dial-up connections slow
Web Site Has Just Undergone Re-design...
New survey

- Shorter version of survey
- Will run on web site for 6 weeks
- Split version
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