

## Accessing Knowledge?:

# People's Use of the Health Information they Seek on the Internet

## Presentation to the Association of Internet Researchers

October 17, 2007

ACTION for Health

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# Accessing Knowledge?: People's Use of the Health Information they Seek on the Internet

Anne McCulloch, MA

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## Outline

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- Study goals
- The Canadian Health Network
- Approach to studying the internet
- Study design and participants
- Key findings
- Contributions



## • Main goal

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### To better understand:

How federal policy-makers assumed Canadians use the Canadian Health Network

*in contrast to*

How people actually use web-based health information



## • Searching → Understanding → Using

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How people use health information obtained on the internet

*rather than*

How people use the internet for health information

**A C T I O N** for **health**



## Study design

Source	Perspective
Policy documents (103)	Federal policy-makers CHN Division
Focus group	CHN Division
Meeting minutes and e-mails	CHN Division
Semi-structured telephone interviews (25)	CHN users
Follow-up e-mails	CHN users
Health websites interviewees mentioned	CHN users


## Study participants

<b>Preferred language</b>	English = 13 French = 12		
<b>Health professionals</b>	7		
<b>Highest level of education</b>	High School = 2 College = 7	Undergraduate = 8 Master's = 8	
<b>Place of internet access</b>	Home = 25 Work = 12		
<b>Province</b>	BC = 3 AB = 2	ON = 7 PQ = 10	NS = 1 NB = 1
<b>Age</b>	Mean = 46 Range = 25 to 74		
<b>Sex</b>	Female = 22 Male = 3		

## Findings: policy assumptions

- ❑ Narrow focus on health promotion, but broad expectations for health care decision-making
- ❑ A web portal would improve the accessibility of reliable health information through:
  - A single point-of-entry
  - Quality resources
  - Links intended for specific populations
- ❑ Tension between:
  - Minimizing government involvement, and
  - the investment required to leverage a website to meet policy goals and expectations





The substance of the network itself is absolutely key. It gets, I think, five million hits a month or something, which makes it the third most-used health data bank or website in the country, after Yahoo and our own Department of Health website. In fact it's gaining adherents every month. It speaks to this tremendous desire on the part of the public for good, reliable information as it relates to their health care, new developments, new discoveries, new this, new that – all this sort of thing (Minister of Health, Standing Committee on Health, 2002).

## Findings: searching

□ The internet was a key source of health information, but they consulted multiple:

- Websites
- Media
- Health professionals
- People

## • Findings: understanding

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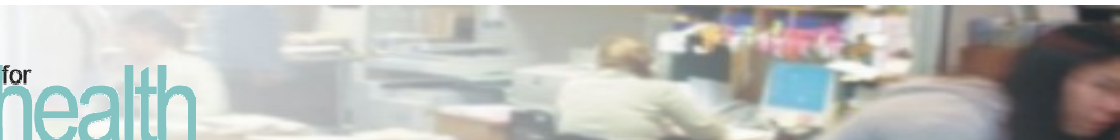
### **Participants drew on supports and faced constraints:**

- Lay and professional health knowledge
- Information literacy and education
- Information in other languages and from other cultures
- People with expertise
- Accessibility of the internet



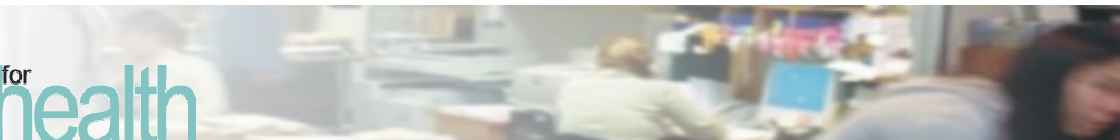
## Findings: using

- Some “healthy choices” but specific health issues were top-of-mind
- Supported family, friends, clients, patients in finding and understanding health topics
- Understanding, peace-of-mind and engagement with a physician, not self-care
- Informed themselves about health issues, but rarely made decisions regarding health care



## Contributions

- ❑ Studying adopters sheds light on for whom and when the technology works, and doesn't
- ❑ The internet, when used in conjunction with other sources and supports, can help people expand their knowledge of health



## • Thank you

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Questions

Comments

Discussion

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