

HINTS PROPOSAL

Proposed Title: Results of the Health Information National Trends Survey: Implications for Medical Practice

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Research questions:

1. Where do adult Americans go for health information, and why?
2. How do Americans rate the credibility of different information sources, including traditional mass media as well as the Internet and new media?
3. How do Americans rate their patient-provider interactions, especially given the objectives articulated by the Healthy People 2010 goals?
4. How is reliance on health information sources outside of the patient-provider dialog related to patients' expressed satisfaction with provider interactions?
5. How do the various communication channels available to consumers relate to health-related knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors?

Study description/rationale:

The context in which patients consume medical information has changed dramatically over the past decade. The 1993 Patient Self-Determination Act (P.L. 101-508 sec. 4206 & 4751) emphasized the rights of individuals to exercise active decision-making in their own health care. Medical schools, in response to the Act, have begun emphasizing the role of the physician as “information broker,” someone who can transfer the evidence of medical science into supports for their patients' personal decision-making.¹ Research on patient-provider communication suggests that the resulting educative and information-sharing styles now adopted by physicians can have a positive influence on patient satisfaction and compliance.²

Likewise, consumers have begun accessing health information on the Internet in record numbers. In 2003, data suggested that some 93 million Americans looked for health information online, making health and medicine the third most frequently searched terms on the Internet after “news stories” and “product research.”³ Those who have found information online and who report taking that information to their physicians, have been “overwhelmingly enthusiastic”⁴ about the support the additional information gives them in understanding their doctors' prescriptions and in complying with treatments. Federal planners envision a national health information delivery system that will support individualized patient decision-making, while at the same time providing physicians with information resources they know to be evidence-based and reliable.⁵

With such a dramatic shift in the public's use of medical information, there are naturally many unresolved questions. It is not clear at this stage just how extensively these trends have progressed. How much does the general public rely on health information from the “new media” (the Internet) compared to their reliance on traditional media (television, print media, family, physicians)? More importantly, how compatible are each of these media channels with patients' medically related information needs? Is the general public taking advantage of information across media, or do they report obstacles in finding reliable and understandable information?^{6,7}

The proposed article will use data from the Health Information National Trends Survey (HINTS)⁸ to answer questions that are important to the community of physicians, medical schools, and health care professionals. The article is intended to be a vanguard release of HINTS data and should be aimed at providing results to the medical community that will make them better information brokers in a new context for medical practice.

Variable list: HINTS.Extended (Keep = Caseno, SPAGE, SPGender, CH1EverHadCancer, CH4FamilyEverHadCancer, HS1GeneralHealth – FWGT, HC1UsualProvider -- HC34fUSCenter, CK1CauseMostDeaths – CK-15CancerCauseMostDeaths)

Method of analysis:

1. Where do adult Americans go for health information, and why?
 - Frequency tables listing the point estimates and 95% CI's for questions HC-5 to HC-8e (Media Exposure), HC-9 to HC-14 (Information seeking), HC-20 to HC-33, and HC-34 (Other communication)
 - Possible crosstabulations using income (scale derived from DM-7) and age (SPAGE) to investigate differences among subpopulations.
 2. How do Americans rate the credibility of different information sources, including traditional mass media as well as the Internet and new media?
 - Point estimates and 95% CI for items HC-15 (reliance), HC-16 (desirable sources), HC-18 (trust) possibly crosstabulated across classification variables.
 - Classify respondents according to preferred information channel. Report means for HC-15A (confidence rating) across levels of classification, tested using an F statistic.
 3. How do Americans rate their patient-provider interactions, especially given the objectives articulated by the Healthy People 2010 goals?
 - Frequency tables of point estimates and 95% CI's for questions HC-1 to HC-4 (Patient Provider Interaction).
 4. How is reliance on health information sources outside of the patient-provider dialog related to patients' expressed satisfaction with provider interactions?
 - Use media preference classification created under Question # 2 above. Compare provider satisfaction scores across levels of media preference classification, tested using an F statistic.
 5. How do the various communication channels available to consumers relate to health-related knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors? (Possible analysis)
 - Construct general K, A, B scores from questions embedded in the general Cancer Knowledge module.
 - Compare means for K, A, B scores across levels of media preference as constructed in Q#2 above.
 - Regress K, A, and/or B scores on selected demographics (e.g., age) and media usage (e.g., trust) to evaluate relative contributions of population-based variables vs. media usage variables to the prediction of desirable outcomes.
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Targeted Journal:

Journal of the American Medical Association
