

Technology & Health

Obj. 8.10: Explain how technology can influence and support people to make positive health choices.



Health Professionals & Technology

Some health professionals use the Internet (blogs, social media, etc.) as a tool to help improve patient health outcomes. We will explore this idea further in this lesson. Do you think your doctor and pharmacist should be using the tools below? Place a check mark next to any of the following electronic activities you think health professionals should use (either with patients specifically, or with the general public as a group). Then explain your reasoning below.

Electronic tools health professionals should use: *(place a check by any that apply)*

- Texting
- Blogging
- E-mail
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
- Instant messaging
- Video messaging
- Youtube (posting content or commenting)
- Other: _____

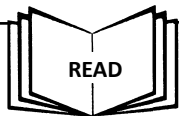
2. Which of the tools should doctors use to communicate with patients directly, if any? Why?
3. Which of the tools should doctors use only to communicate with a larger audience as a whole (which may or may not include their specific patients)? Why?
4. What are the possible BENEFITS of health professionals using these electronic tools?
5. What are the possible RISKS of health professionals using these electronic tools?



Why are Patients NOT Finding Their Doctors Online?

Watch the TED talk, "Why are patients NOT finding their doctors online?" by Dr. Wendy Sue Swanson. Then discuss the questions below:

- 1) What perspectives or roles does Wendy Sue Swanson speak from?
- 2) According to Dr. Swanson, what opportunities does social media give us?
- 3) "Roughly 80% of the people in the USA first go to Google when they are concerned about something in their body." What is Dr. Swanson's overall response to this fact. Do you agree with her approach? Why or why not?



“Health Online 2013” Research Findings

Susannah Fox & Maeve Duggan, Pew Research (1/15/13)

Source: <http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/01/15/health-online-2013/>

One in three American adults have gone online to figure out a medical condition.

Thirty-five percent of U.S. adults say that at one time or another they have gone online specifically to try to figure out what medical condition they or someone else might have. These findings come from a national survey by the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project. Throughout this report, we call those who searched for answers on the internet “online diagnosers.”

When asked if the information found online led them to think they needed the attention of a medical professional, 46% of online diagnosers say that was the case. Thirty-eight percent of online diagnosers say it was something they could take care of at home and 11% say it was both or in-between.

When we asked respondents about the accuracy of their initial diagnosis, they reported:

- 1 41% of online diagnosers say a medical professional confirmed their diagnosis. An additional 2% say a medical professional partially confirmed it.
- 2 35% say they did not visit a clinician to get a professional opinion.
- 3 18% say they consulted a medical professional and the clinician either did not agree or offered a different opinion about the condition.
- 4 1% say their conversation with a clinician was inconclusive.

Women are more likely than men to go online to figure out a possible diagnosis. Other groups that have a high likelihood of doing so include younger people, white adults, those who live in households earning \$75,000 or more, and those with a college degree or advanced degrees.

It is important to note what these findings mean – and what they don’t mean. Historically, people have always tried to answer their health questions at home and made personal choices about whether and when to consult a clinician. Many have now added the internet to their personal health toolbox, helping themselves and their loved ones better understand what might be ailing them. This study was not designed to determine whether the internet has had a good or bad influence on health care. It measures the scope, but not the outcome, of this activity.

1. Do you think the trend of looking up information online to figure out a possible diagnosis continues to the treatment phase of the disease process? In other words, are these same people looking up information on the drugs or treatments they are prescribed? If not, why not? If so, what are the implications of this? What is the pharmacists’ role?

Clinicians are a central resource for information or support during serious health episodes — and the care and conversation take place mostly offline.

To try to capture a focused picture of people’s health information search and information-assessment strategies, we asked respondents to think about the last time they had a serious health issue and to whom they turned for help, either online or offline:

- 1 70% of U.S. adults got information, care, or support from a doctor or other health care professional.

- 2 60% of adults got information or support from friends and family.
- 3 24% of adults got information or support from others who have the same health condition.

The vast majority of this care and conversation took place offline, but a small group of people did communicate with each of these sources online. And, since a majority of adults consult the internet when they have health questions, these communications with clinicians, family, and fellow patients joined the stream of information flowing in.

2. What are the benefits and drawbacks of care that takes place **offline**?

Eight in 10 online health inquiries start at a search engine

Looking more broadly at the online landscape, 72% of internet users say they looked online for health information of one kind or another within the past year. This includes searches related to serious conditions, general information searches, and searches for minor health problems. For brevity's sake, we will refer to this group as "online health seekers."

When asked to think about the last time they hunted for health or medical information, 77% of online health seekers say they began at a search engine such as Google, Bing, or Yahoo. Another 13% say they began at a site that specializes in health information, like WebMD. Just 2% say they started their research at a more general site like Wikipedia and an additional 1% say they started at a social network site like Facebook.

3. Do health care professionals have a responsibility to talk to their patients about where they are getting their information from online? Why or why not? Besides talking to patients, what other ways could health care professionals get more involved in steering patients to accurate and helpful information online?

Half of health information searches are on behalf of someone else

When asked to think about the last time they went online for health or medical information, 39% of online health seekers say they looked for information related to their own situation. Another 39% say they looked for information related to someone else's health or medical situation. An additional 15% of these internet users say they were looking both on their own and someone else's behalf.

One in four people seeking health information online have hit a pay wall

Twenty-six percent of internet users who look online for health information say they have been asked to pay for access to something they wanted to see online. Of those who have been asked to pay, just 2% say

they did so. Fully 83% of those who hit a pay wall say they tried to find the same information somewhere else. Thirteen percent of those who hit a pay wall say they just gave up.

4. What are some barriers to accessing health information online?

The social life of health information is a low-key but steady presence in American life

In past surveys, the Pew Internet Project has not defined a time period for health activities online. This time, the phrase “in the past 12 months” was added to help focus respondents on recent episodes. We find once again that there is a social life of health information, as well as peer-to-peer support, as people exchange stories about their own health issues to help each other understand what might lie ahead:

- 1 26% say they read or watched someone else’s experience about health or medical issues in the last 12 months.
- 2 16% of internet users say they went online in the last year to find others who might share the same health concerns.

Health-related reviews and rankings continue to be used by only a modest group of consumers. About one in five internet users have consulted online reviews of particular drugs or medical treatments, doctors or other providers, and hospitals or medical facilities. And just 3-4% of internet users have posted online reviews of health care services or providers.

6. Given that there are many ways to engage in health information online, what type of information or activity would you recommend for patients if you were a health care provider? Would there be any information or types of activity you would discourage? Why?

DISCUSS

Where are the Health Care Professionals?

This research demonstrates that patients are going online for their health in large numbers. So why aren’t most pharmacists, doctors, and other health professionals also online? With a partner, discuss and list as many reasons as you can for why many health care professionals are not taking their work online.



Harnessing the Power of the Internet for Health

Studies have shown prevalent health information-seeking on the Internet is today. In order to capitalize on this trend, explain some possible actions health professionals should take.



Who IS online?

There are a number of health professionals who are engaging with patients and populations to improve health online, and this trend is only growing. Find one example of a health professional engaging in health dialogue online. They could be blogging, creating video content on Youtube or Vimeo, using social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc.), updating a web page for their medical practice, or some combination of these things. Fill out the table below.

Name of Health Professional	
Type(s) of Online Activity (include usernames and/or URLs)	
Background/Bio of Health Professional (job/role, specialty, interests, and any other relevant information)	
Type of Information Posted (give specific examples)	
Evaluation of Online Presence (Overall, does this health professional make a useful contribution to health information online? Why/why not?)	