

## Developing and Evaluating Online Education to Improve Older Adults' Health Information

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<b>Organization:</b>	Langley Research Institute
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<b>Summary Status as of:</b>	December 2010

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**Target Population:** Adults, Elderly\*

**Summary:** An increasing number of Americans, including seniors, are turning to the Internet for information about health care. However, the ability to identify accurate, high-quality health Web sites can be difficult. There is little data about older consumers' awareness of varying quality of health care information on the Internet, and whether or not seniors are able to distinguish between high- and low-quality Web-based health information.

The goal of this project is to develop and evaluate the first theory-based online health educational program for people 55 years-of-age and older. The program aims to improve older adults' ability to identify high-quality health Web sites and to promote self-efficacy for communicating with physicians.

The project will conduct focus groups to identify older adults' preferences for online learning about health topics to inform the design of an interactive online educational program. The use of the interactive educational program will be compared to educational materials that are not interactive and not geared specifically to older adults. Interviews with users of each of the two programs will document differences in participants' knowledge and skill in identifying high-quality health Web sites and self-efficacy in communicating with physicians. The project will result in a theory-based educational program developed with the cooperation and advice of older health consumers.

### Specific Aims:

- Convene focus groups to identify older adults' preferences for online learning about health. **(Ongoing)**
- Develop an interactive online educational program to teach older adults to improve their knowledge and skills in identifying high-quality health Web sites and enhance their ability to efficaciously communicate with their physicians. **(Upcoming)**
- Pilot test the feasibility of the program. **(Upcoming)**
- Evaluate the outcomes of the new program compared to an alternative. **(Upcoming)**

**2010 Activities:** During the first quarter of the project, Dr. Fink conducted three patient focus groups to identify older adults' online learning preferences. Participants were recruited by a community partner through flyers, newsletters, articles in the local newspaper, and mailings. The focus groups were conducted in a flexible semi-structured format to allow participants to bring up topics that matter to them, to build

conversation from what other group members discuss, and to allow the moderator to probe for deeper insight into discussions. Questions focused on Web sites used for health searches, topics of interest, ways to inform older people about the proposed program, the role of friends and families in guiding health information Web searches, and how to evaluate the accuracy of Web-based health information.

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**Grantee's Most Recent Self-Reported Quarterly Status (as of December 2010):** Project milestones and aims are completely on track. The project budget is somewhat underspent to conserve resources for program development, the most cost-intensive part of the project.

**Preliminary Impact and Findings:** The preliminary findings from the focus groups indicate that the majority of participants use Google as an initial portal for health information, while several participants, upon recommendations from their providers, use sites associated with well-known medical institutions. There was general agreement that participants had no systematic method or criteria for evaluating health information, aside from cross-checking multiple Web sites. Participants agreed that a list of high-quality sites and criteria for evaluating information would be very useful. The overwhelming amount of information on the Web was reported to be a major barrier to effective use. There was near uniform agreement that an education tool with trial exercises would be beneficial.

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**Strategic Goal:** Develop and disseminate health IT evidence and evidence-based tools to improve health care decisionmaking through the use of integrated data and knowledge management.

**Business Goal:** Knowledge Creation

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\* *AHRQ Priority Population*