

PATIENT READINESS TO USE INTERNET HEALTH RESOURCES

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Background: Nationally, half of patients with chronic disease use the Internet, however little is known about what promotes or inhibits patient use of the Internet for health information.

Methods: To learn more about why patients may or may not use Internet health resources, we conducted four focus groups with patients with chronic conditions, grouped by whether or not they used the Internet to search for health information (2 groups users, 2 groups non-users). Patients were recruited from MU Family Medicine clinic waiting rooms, using a brief survey about Internet use. We asked patients about their use of the Internet for personal use and for health information, web sites used to obtain health information, recent searches for health information, and how they used this information to impact their health.

Results: Most patients surveyed did use the Internet for health information, including those with a chronic condition. WebMD was a commonly cited source among those who used Internet health resources. Most patients stated they used the Internet to look up health information because it was faster and more convenient than calling a member of their health care team. Additionally, looking up information before their visit enhanced their physician visit. The most commonly stated concerns about the Internet were security and privacy.

Conclusions: Use of the Internet for health information among patients with chronic conditions is an accessory to their relationship with their physician; those with less established relationships may rely on the Internet more heavily.