

POSTER ABSTRACTS

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Using Focus Groups to Inform a Web Intervention

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Background: The World Wide Web is used to provide health education and information, with the ability to surpass mass media in reaching people in an efficient, interactive, and cost-effective manner. Five HMO Cancer Research Network sites conducted focus groups to inform and improve the creation of a web-based, tailored intervention to increase fruit and vegetable consumption.

Methods: Focus groups were conducted at all sites using methods described by Krueger (1994). Each site contributed and finalized questions eliciting attitudes and beliefs on diet with special attention to eating fruits and vegetables, preferred way of receiving diet change recommendations, and general internet usage and preferences. Those recruited were HMO members between the ages of --21 and 65, having Internet access and using email. Groups were divided by sex and, at selected HMOs, were divided by race. Participants were encouraged to visit a demonstration website before the session so they could provide feedback. After the two-hour audio-taped discussion, participants completed a survey regarding computer use.

Results: Across the five sites, a total of 130 participants responded to the survey, including 71 women and 59 men. Responses did not vary by gender. Three-fourths of the participants had a home computer and 90% had either dial-up or DSL internet connection, using some version of Windows operating system (89%), with Internet Explorer (61%) as the most common web browser. An important source of health information was a physician (80%), dietician (64%), and NCI (46%). On a scale of 1 to 10, 77% felt comfortable answering personal health-related questions on a web-based questionnaire and 55% felt confident that information they submit on a website will be kept private and confidential. The following items increased respondents' confidence about providing personal information: privacy notice (89%), a letter from their HMO (70%), including contact information (63%), sponsoring research university (58%), and a professional look (53%). Respondents preferred a short text, easy to read and "cut to the chase" information approach.

Conclusions: These focus group results supported feasibility estimates of this intervention, and have guided the process, content and appearance of the MENU Choices web intervention.