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Who Will Enroll? Participants in a Web-based Cancer Risk Reduction Program – the MENU Choices Study

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Background: Risk for many health conditions may be reduced by increasing or maintaining high fruit and vegetable intake. The challenge is to provide this message and “how-to” strategies to people who may benefit. Our approach proposed an interactive Web-based program designed to support a change in diet. This report describes participants who have enrolled to date in this multi-site program (total study target 2500).

Methods: Letters were mailed to a random sample of HMO members, within strata defined by gender and HMO (GHC, HF/HAP, HP, KPCO, KPGA). Eligibility included age range of 21 – 65 years, at least weekly use of email and access to the internet for personal use, and no active cancer treatment. Three sites over-sampled to increase recruitment of under-represented minorities.

Results: Of the current 1433 enrollees (10% participation rate), 67% were women, mean age was 47.2 (s.d.10.6), with 8% Asian, 18% Black, 74% White/other. Education level included 53% having completed 4-year college or graduate school, 39% some college or vocational school, and 9% high school graduation or less; 54% rated comfort with the Internet as extremely comfortable and 16% were extremely uncomfortable. BMI scores ranged from 32% for BMI of 24.9 or less (normal), 27% for BMI of 25.0 – 29.9 (overweight), 17% for 30.0 – 34.9 (obese), and 15% for 35.0 or above. 52% rated general health as excellent or very good, 38% as good, and 10% as fair or poor. Activity level was rated as very (15%), somewhat (48%), low (30%) or no (7%) activity. For the majority, daily servings of fruit was 1 or zero (57%), daily servings of vegetables was 2 or less (77%), and most were in contemplation (C) stage followed by maintenance (M) stage (fruit 51% C, 23% M; vegetables 63% C, 18% M.)

Conclusions: Findings reported here suggest that recruitment efforts attracted a wide range of participants, with a range of fruit and vegetable eating habits, health status, and internet expertise. A higher number of those who enrolled were well-educated and had higher than ideal BMI. Women were more likely than men to enroll.