

POSTER SESSION 2 ABSTRACTS
12th Annual HMO Research Network Conference

May 1-3, 2006 Boston, MA

Health Communications
PS2-35

**Recruiting for Internet-based Health Communications Research:
Lessons Learned from Two Pioneering Studies**

KE Johnson, PhD¹, SM Greene, MPH¹, J McClure, PhD¹, C Wiese, MA¹,
G Alexander, PhD², M Brooks, BA¹, R Pardee, JD¹

¹Center for Health Studies, Group Health Cooperative, Seattle, WA;

²Henry Ford Health System, Detroit, MI

Background: Internet access, use, and familiarity are increasing in the United States. The Internet is attractive as a new mode for offering health information and for conducting health research studies. However, limited information exists about the opportunities and challenges of recruitment for Internet-based research studies.

The Center for Health Communications Research at the University of Michigan (UM) has launched novel program projects studying effective health communication. Collaborators include Group Health Cooperative (GHC) and Henry Ford Health System (HFHS). Two research interventions are on the Internet. Project Quit offers tailored smoking cessation advice and nicotine replacement patches. Guide to Decide studies whether and how to customize the presentation of numerical information in order to help people make difficult health decisions, using a tamoxifen breast cancer chemoprevention decision aid. Through these two studies, the researchers learned important lessons about recruiting for Internet-based research studies and enrolling study participants over the Internet.

Methods: Participants for both studies were recruited from GHC and HFHS. Researchers used automated data to prescreen individuals for probable eligibility. Potential subjects then received an invitation letter by US Mail inviting them to visit the UM-hosted study website and enter an access code, and enroll themselves. Using a case study approach, we summarized lessons learned from recruiting and enrolling participants in both studies.

Results: Our experience highlights a series of technical, administrative, and human considerations for recruitment and study implementation over the Internet. Testing such studies for appropriate security, aesthetics, and logic requires substantial time and planning. Documented consent is not possible over the Internet, raising participant verification challenges. Many people who want to participate need additional help, so customer service is necessary. Participants appear to regard Internet programs differently -- while some appreciate the convenience, others think it is too anonymous. We compare demographics of those who enrolled to those of the general HMO population.

Conclusions: The Internet is an increasingly viable strategy for conducting and recruiting for research among different population types. However, doing so requires unique technical and customer service planning. IT is increasingly accepted and expected in health care, which, in turn creates research opportunities.