

G. SECKIN. *Cyber-seniors surfing the medical web: Role of Internet in cancer care and perceived 'info-decisional' benefits*. *Gerontechnology* 2010;9(2):330; doi:10.4017/gt.2010.09.02.182.00

Purpose The Internet is leading the future of medical informatics through wide dissemination of health and medical information. Eighty-two percent of the Americans aged 50 to 64 and 66% of those aged 65 and older use the Internet to gather information about their health problems. However, research is limited in its examination of the extent of influence the Internet plays on health care management of older adults. This paper contributes to the literature by examining perceived informational and decisional benefits of online medical information. It is important to assess perceived benefits of health information technology use so that it can be targeted by researchers as a strategic tool to facilitate patients' informed decision making process and their proactive participation in cancer care. **Method** This paper examined self-reported benefits of online health and medical information among a convenience sample (N=189) of middle aged and older (M=58.1, SD=6.6) cancer patients. The participants reported diverse cancer diagnoses and ranged from the recently diagnosed to long-term survivors. Internet-based data collection was employed. The paper presents a multivariate hierarchical regression model of perceived benefits and contextualizes the discussion within a larger context of the US managed health care system. Two separate models of hierarchical regression analyses were performed in order to estimate the impact of demographic and socio-economic characteristics, health status variables, and characteristics of using online cancer information on perceived benefits. **Results & Discussion** The respondents reported that they use the information they learn from health web sites to inform their own decisions about cancer treatment options, medications and other health care issues. The findings suggest that online information sources are perceived to be empowering by a diverse group of older cancer patients. These cyber-seniors and middle-aged health consumers looked for health information to prepare themselves for doctor's visits before and after medical appointments. They also reported that gathering information enabled them to inquire about additional explanations from doctors, or prompted them to seek consultations with other doctors. Feeling empowered to question and even challenge a doctor's decisions were among the reported benefits. Even though bivariate analyses found the number of sites visited and the history of use to be significant, they became non-significant when hierarchical multivariate regressions were performed. However, more frequent contact and longer time spent with online cancer information sites remained significant. Results suggested that users choose a few sites they find helpful, as they reported an average of two web sites, and that browsing more web sites does not substantially contributed to already obtained information. Similarly, the respondents with a longer history of using the Internet cancer sites did not report significantly more benefits compared to those with a shorter history. The results confirm a health care trend in which middle aged and older adults are assuming a more participatory role in making decisions for their health and using online information resources to educate themselves to do so. This represents a significant step in modern medicine where patients' access to health information technology is essential to promoting personal health.

References

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Keywords: Internet, age, cancer, information, decision

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