Health Related Web Site Usage by Persons with Serious Mental Illness: Design and Use of a Health Literacy Survey Tool

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Keywords
Website Evaluation, Website Quality, Mental Health Information Literacy

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Health-Related Website Usage by Persons with Serious Mental Illness:

Design and Use of a Health Literacy Survey Tool

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The Survey
- A literature review identified scholarly research on website design as well as validated health literacy evaluation tools for persons with SMI that formed the basis of the survey.
- A survey tool of 64 questions was developed using pre-existing, validated health literacy instruments, e.g., DISCERN (Vose, 02).
- Questions sought feedback on format, navigation, usability and credibility as well as content of each site.
- 20 health-related websites on topics of physical health issues experienced by persons with SMI (cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes and smoking) were chosen using simple searches through the Google search engine.

The Results
- Highest consistency obtained by Smokefree.gov followed by Wikipedia pages and government websites (i.e., Medline Plus).
- For overall weighted score, Wikipedia, CDC/Cardiovascular Diseases and the Mayo Clinic Heart Diseases pages performed the highest.

Discussion
- Survey was successful in identifying websites that we can use as a template for completion of the project goal.
- The websites that obtained highest consistency scores were government websites and Wikipedia, which less bias may be present.
- Lowest consistency scores were found in some medical society sites as well as in sites such as WebMD. We hypothesize that advertisements or the specific mission/state of the society may be more biased.
- Those results correlate well with patient, librarian and mental health professional views obtained through focus groups also conducted as a part of this project.

This survey demonstrated:
- The successful creation and use of a survey instrument designed to evaluate websites with the framework of best practice usage for persons with SMI.
- Reviewers consistency scoring matched formatting guidelines for SMI users recommended in existing research.
- Provided clear guidance as to initial design methodology for the next phase of this project – creation of a health literacy training website designed for persons with serious mental illness.