Results of the 10th HON survey on health and medical Internet use
(July – August 2010)

Natalia PLETNEVA, Sarah CRUCHET, Maria-Ana SIMONET,
Maki KAJIWARA, Célia BOYER
Health on the Net Foundation, Geneva, Switzerland

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More people are addressing the Internet to **answer their health-related questions**.

Possible **outcomes of health information search** on the Internet can be both positive (better awareness, more skillful and educated patients) and negative (following misleading advice found on the web, cyberchondria, physician mistrust).

However, overall **tendency** is following:
Survey Overview

**Aim of the study:**
As the mission of the Health on the Net Foundation (HON) is to guide the growing community of healthcare consumers and providers on the World Wide Web to sound, trustworthy medical information and expertise, we have been interested in seeing the trend in the attitude towards Internet use for health purposes since 1996.

**Time frame:** July – August 2010 hosted on HON web site
**Language:** English (65%) and French (35% of total results)
**Participants:** 524 respondents from 60 countries around the world, majority – France (28%), the UK (18%), the USA (18%)
**Target audience:** Individuals/citizens/patients (65%) and medical professionals (35%)
**Methodology:** Non-probabilistic sampling, where appropriate the comparison with the results of survey 2005 was done
Participants profile

- Target audiences were both general public (65% of respondents) and health and medical professionals (remaining 35%)
- The majority of the participants are aged between 20 and 59 years old with the most active age group of 30-39 years old (30%), there were more female (65%) than male (35%) participants.
- 58% of participants come from Europe and 22% from Northern America. Overall, most of the participants live in France (28%), the USA (18%) and the UK (18%).
- The participants are mostly highly educated: 23% have Master Degree and 22% at least 4 years of college/university education.
Use of the Internet

- 7 or more years of Internet use experience (79%) (44% in 2005)
- The popularity of WiFi connection is growing (37% comparing with 4% in 2005)
- 50% of users spend from 2 to 4 hours per day in the Internet (in 2005 36%) and 22% less than 2 hours (in 2005 39%)
- Most of respondents spend time online checking emails (96%) and browsing web (93%)
- Growing popularity of web 2.0: 60% read newsletter, online communities (28% in 2005) and 51% participate in online communities (23% in 2005)
Internet for health

- 44% of users was searching for health information more than 3 times during “past week”, 25% did it from 2 to 3 times
- In 79% of cases a web search was the starting point to clarify medical information (for citizens)
- The popularity of general search engines for health topics has increased from 86% in 2005 to 94% in 2010
- The importance of hospitals as a source of online health information has increased from 60% (2005) to 77%
- People mostly search for disease description (69%) and medical literature (62%)
- In pharmaceutical domain side effects are the most sought topic (60%)
- Most of the users are looking for information for themselves (77%)
- 29% admitted they were anxious after looking for health information online, and 22% were not sure whether they were anxious or not
What are the difficulties?

- Information quality: 80%
- Medical data privacy: 54%
- Internet connection speed/download time: 45%
- Lack of time: 37%
- Support for Internet use in my professional/office setting: 36%
- Inadequate tools and applications: 34%
- Not enough computer or Internet training: 24%
Citizens – Health Professionals’ communication

Positive trends:
- 53% of citizens participated in the survey declared they discuss the results of their internet search with their doctors. More English-speaking professionals who see the patients in their practice discuss with their patients the information found online, comparing with the French-speaking ones (75% vs 47%)
- Citizens think that a healthcare provider should suggest trustworthy sources of online health information (80%) as well as a list of specific health web sites similar to drug prescription (75%). 72% of the professionals agree that it would be helpful for them to guide patients to a trustworthy (online) source (59% in 2005). Most of the physicians would use a trustworthy online service for this purpose, especially if it is free for the patient (87%)

Negative trends:
- 70% of the citizens and 53% of professionals rarely or never email to each other (59% and 35% in 2005)
### Patient health information-seeking:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>General Public</th>
<th>Health Professionals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>is a waste of a patient's time</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>increases the risk of patient self-treatment</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saves time in patient consultation</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>encourages people to fight against their diseases</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improves the quality of patient consultation</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improves doctor-patient communication</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helps a patient become a better 'partner' with his/her physician</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helps patients become more knowledgeable</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions

- First, we need to create more awareness among Internet users of reliable tools for “healthy” online surfing.
- Secondly we have to educate both the general public and health professionals on search and assessment of online health information. Medical students and practicing doctors should have such courses as a part of their curriculum. We believe that a similar course should be created for Internet users and adjusted to their background.
- And thirdly, patients and doctors need a communication tool which would be easy to use, save time during consultations, decrease professionals’ workload, and ensure access to trustworthy information on the web.
Thank you for your attention!

Questions? Suggestions? Critics?

New HON survey results recently released and can be found here: http://www.hon.ch/Survey/khresmoi_general_public_survey_results.html

If you have further questions, please email to: Nataly.Pletneva@HealthOnNet.org