

Health Communication in the New Millennium: Getting Health Information to a Population Through New Media

Thursday, April 29, 2010, at 4:00 p.m.

The Universities at Shady Grove
The Camille Kendall Academic Center
Building III, Room 3241
9636 Gudelsky Drive
Rockville, MD 20850

The Issue

Blogs, apps, social media, online videos, computer games, text messaging, and consumer-generated content are all part of the new media landscape that have fundamentally changed information flow. Health communicators face increasing challenges and opportunities for reaching their target audiences.

What We Know

Use of cell phone text messaging, social media, and online videos has escalated dramatically over the last 5 years. Today, 79 percent of Americans are online, and 48 percent of online Americans use social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter. Nearly 1 in 5 Internet users are using Twitter or another service to share updates about themselves or to see updates about others. Eighty-three percent of Americans have a cell phone, and 58 percent of Americans uses cell phone text messaging.

Within this information context, the Internet has emerged as a critical vehicle for health information—both for the health facts and for social support. Approximately 80 percent of the U.S. adult population look for health information online, and among people looking for online health information, 41 percent have read someone else's commentary or experience about health or medical issues on an online news group, web site, or blog.

Goals for the Presentation

This presentation will provide an overview of the changing media landscape and its implications for health messaging. Recent applications of new media to improve patient provider communications, reach at risk youth, disseminate risk communication messages, and encourage lifestyle changes will be discussed. Examples include, smoking cessation and weight loss interventions administered via cell phones, HIV and youth dating violence prevention social media campaigns aimed at high risk populations, computer games designed to improve adolescent health, and a FDA/CDC peanut recall blog.

Perspectives from disseminators and consumers of health information will be provided through a series of short video clips from interviews conducted with social media experts at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an American University communication professor, and members of the general public.

Contributors

Simani Price, PhD, Senior Study Director, Westat, is an applied social psychologist and directs a wide range of health communication research and evaluation studies at Westat. Her current research focuses on messaging and persuasion, provider-patient communication, risk communication, and media analysis.

Jennifer Berkold, MA, Senior Study Director, Westat, is a sociologist who specializes in health communication, public opinion, and social networks. She conducts research on youth and the Internet, and currently directs the evaluation of the Boss of Me campaign, a dating violence prevention campaign aimed at California youth.