

Evaluating the Design and Information of the Top 185 Breast Cancer Websites

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Background

The internet is a prominent source of health information for the public. A plethora of studies have already been conducted on the public's use of the internet to seek information on breast cancer (Thomas et al., 2002) and the quality of breast cancer websites (Hoffman-Goetz & Clarke, 2000). This research seeks to dig deeper and evaluate both the type and range of information, as well as basic use and design tenets of the top 185 breast cancer websites.

Objective

A content analysis coding scheme was created by the research team that includes over 100 elements. Data will provide important information to explain the current strengths and weaknesses of popular breast cancer websites. A summary of the results will offer a prescriptive template for improving the information and design of breast cancer websites for multiple stakeholders.

Methods

The three most frequently used search engines (Nielsen/NetRatings, 2006), Google, Yahoo and MSN, were searched using the key words "breast cancer" and "breast cancer environment". The top one hundred hits from all six searches were then combined into one list. One hundred and eighty-five websites met the study's inclusionary criteria. Each website was evaluated with two sets of questions. The first attends to the basic use and design tenets of the website. Questions for this tool came from P. F Anderson and et al's "Web site Evaluation Checklist" (1999), Karen McLachlan's "WWW Cyberguide Ratings for Website Design," (2002), McLachlan's "WWW Cyberguide Ratings for Content Evaluation," (2002) and a few questions were designed specifically for this project. The second tool assesses information on the website. Questions for this instrument were derived from three behavioral change theories; the ten processes of change from Velicer et al.'s stages of change/theoretical model (1998), the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen & Madden, 1986), and the extended parallel process model (Witte, 1992). Additional questions to evaluate the inclusion of community concerns, risk factors, diversity issues, interactivity, social support, research results, step-by-step directions, credibility of authors, and health issues related to breast cancer were also included.

Results & Conclusions

After the 185 websites have been coded into the categories mentioned above, and reliability is established, analysis to investigate relationships between the variables will be conducted. The results will enable us to form conclusions about the current state of breast cancer websites and to create a plan for future websites to better serve users.

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