

The Consequences of Seniors Seeking Health Information Using the Internet and Other Sources

Stephanie Medlock, MSc, DVM

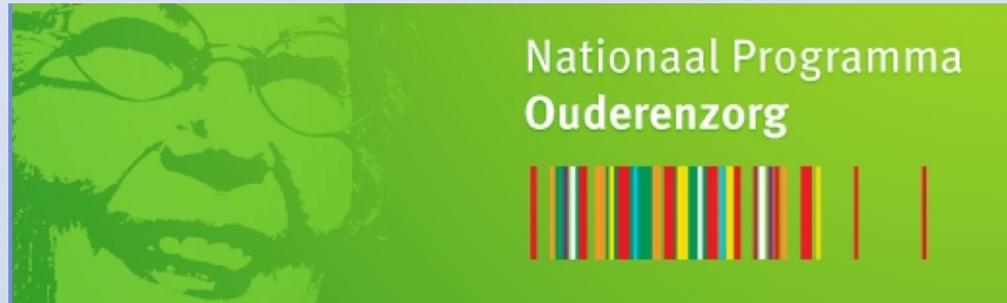
Saeid Eslami, PharmD, PhD

Marjan Askari, MSc

Danielle Sent, PhD

Sophia E. de Rooij, MD, PhD

Ameen Abu-Hanna, PhD



National program for care of the elderly



Department of
Medical Informatics

Academic Medical Center
Amsterdam
The Netherlands



The Consequences of **Seniors Seeking Health Information Using the Internet and Other Sources**

Patient empowerment is important

... but what is patient empowerment?

Context: Patient Empowerment

“Patient empowerment is a process to help people **gain control**, which includes people **taking the initiative, solving problems, and making decisions**, and can be applied to different settings in health and social care, and self management.”

Context: Patient Empowerment



- Empowerment requires information that allows patients to take action
 - take the initiative
 - solve problems
 - make decisions
 - gain control
- The internet is an effective medium for providing health information

Context: Patient Empowerment



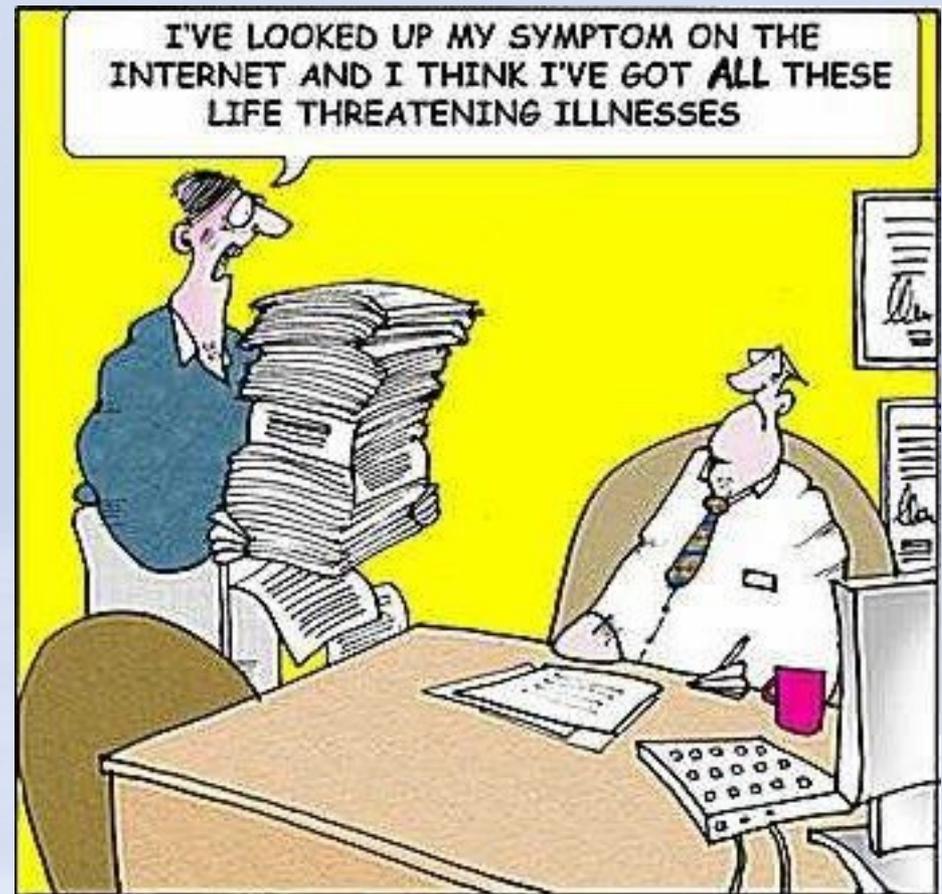
- Empowering seniors requires providing health information for seniors *in a form that they can understand and act upon*
- Is the internet an effective medium for providing health information to seniors?

Context: Internet use among seniors in the Netherlands

- 81% of people aged 65-75 years use the internet
- 54% of people aged 65-75 years use the internet for health information (66% of internet users)
- 34% of people >75 years use the internet
- Seniors are the fastest-growing group of internet users

Context: Health information online

- What information sources do seniors use and trust for health information?
- **What are the consequences of seniors seeking health information?**
- How do seniors feel about this information?
- What actions do they take?



Cyberchondria

Methods: Survey development

Questions from:

E-health and the elderly: 11 questions
health "Consequences of Health Information Seeking" of
older Americans.

Rideout VJ, Neuman T, Kitchman M, Brodie M. 2005

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Use of information needs and decision-making style
among older Internet users and nonusers.

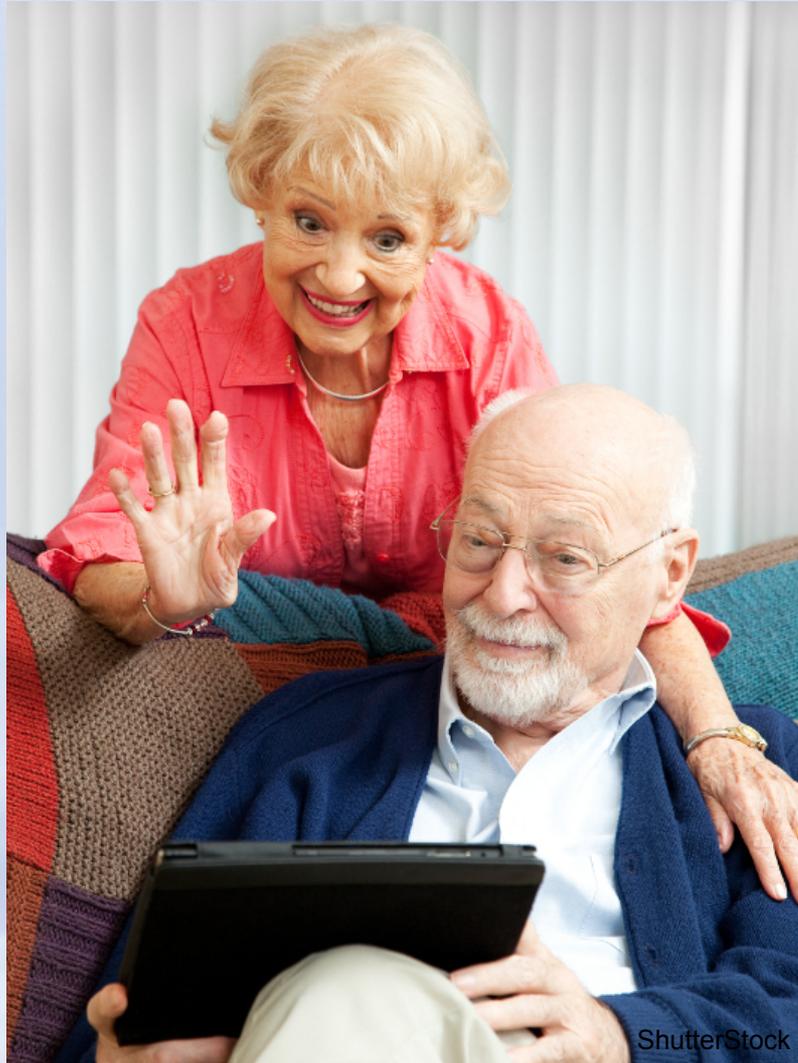
Use of and trust in sources of health information
Taha J, Shatt J, Czaja S. 2009

Searching for health information

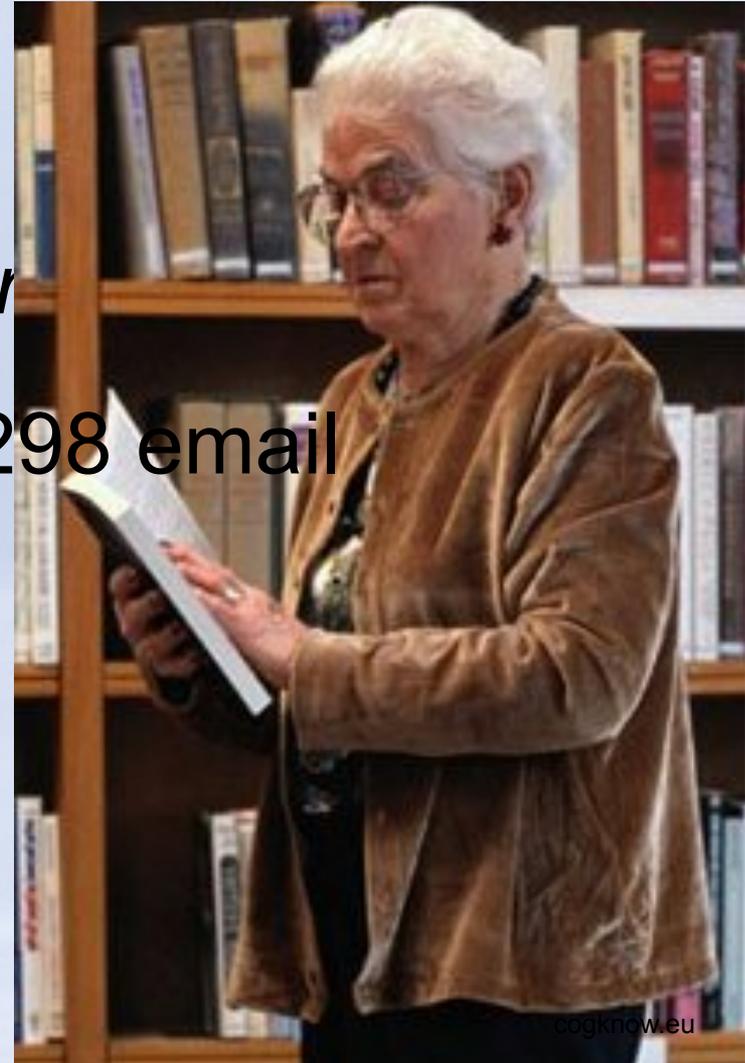
Use and perception of internet for health related purposes
Information-seeking related to fall prevention
in Germany: results of a national survey.

Dumitru RC, Bürkle T, Potapov S, Lausen B, Wiese B, Prokosch HU. 2007

Methods: Study population

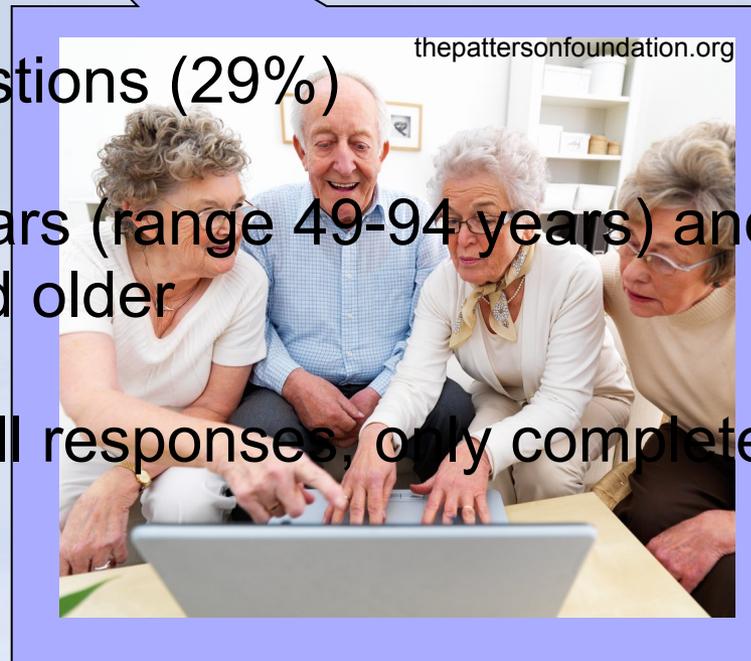


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Results: Survey response

- 118 responses (~40%)
- 100 completed at least one question from this section (34%)
- 86 completed all questions (29%)
- Mean age was 72 years (range 49-94 years) and 85% were age 65 and older
- No difference using all responses, only complete, and only >65



Results: Sources of health information

- 85% use the internet for health information, 54% use it “a fair amount” or “a lot.”
- Those who use the internet for health information reported higher use of **all other resources** as well
- 44% said the internet is their *preferred source* of health information
 - 36% other sources
 - 17% only health professionals

Results: Consequences

As a result of the information I found, I have:

	never/once	sometimes/often
decided to go to the doctor	66%	34%
decided <i>not</i> to go to the doctor	81%	19%
discussed the information with a doctor	70%	30%
made lifestyle changes	49%	51%
changed my medicine without consulting a doctor	97%	3%

Results: Consequences

As a result of the information I found, I have:

	never/once	sometimes/often
questioned a diagnosis	59%	41%
questioned a treatment	64%	36%
felt anxiety	64%	36%
felt reassured	45%	54%
felt more confused	66%	34%
felt more knowledgeable	43%	58%

Results: Correlation with internet use

Both feeling anxious *and* feeling reassured were correlated with higher internet use

But...

this association became non-significant when corrected for use of information resources in general

Main findings

- 85% used the internet for health information, and 54% use it “a fair amount” or “a lot.”
- Mostly *did not* act on the information
 - lifestyle changes were an exception
- Both feelings of **anxiety** and **reassurance** were correlated with internet use
 - but not when corrected for higher use of all resources

Implications

- Seniors *are* using the internet for health information
- Future surveys need to ask about *both* positive and negative consequences
- Translating knowledge into action may provide opportunities to empower seniors in maintaining their health

Limitations

- We intentionally surveyed only internet users
- Only 18 of the seniors in our survey *did not* use the internet for health information
 - only 7 of those used other information resources
- Some risk of social desirability bias, positivity effect
- Respondents may know each other

Future work

- Repeat the survey with a larger population, including non-internet users.
- Study *how* seniors use the internet for health information: what do they search for and do they find good information?
- Investigate barriers to action, to help seniors gain control in the health care process.

Conclusions

- Seniors **are using the internet** for health information
- Use is associated with an increase in **both positive and negative** consequences
- Except lifestyle changes, most **did not act** on the information they found

This is an opportunity to increase empowerment of seniors.