

Internet Searching Behaviors of Low Literacy Breast Cancer Survivors

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Internet searching is a popular tool for patients to find health-related information. However, low literacy individuals are at a disadvantage with respect to their ability to evaluate online health information. When using common web search engines to find health information, behaviors such as misspelling, misappropriation of words and incomplete search queries can result in inadequate results and misleading information. The goal of this research is to understand the search strategies and common mistakes that low-literacy Latina breast cancer survivors exhibit when searching for information online in order to inform future information seeking interfaces. To explore search behaviors online we asked survivors of breast cancer to search specific information about their condition on the web using either written or voice search. We also invited their caregivers as they often provide support for them. We video-taped their activity and analyzed the strategies they used to find information using a coding scheme developed for this task. We found that participants spent considerably more time evaluating the results lists rather than reading the information on any individual result. We also found that participants frequently read aloud as a comprehension strategy. We also surveyed the caregivers who, seemed to know less about breast cancer than the actual survivors. This study should be considered preliminary as we only have analyzed the activities of five women, however, there is a strong indication that low-literacy patients may not be understanding all they read on the internet and, moreover, result sets seem to overwhelm them. Lastly, it is possible that their caregivers are not able to help guide them either.