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Et al.

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Cutrona SL, Mazor KM, Naveed S, Luger TM, Volkman JE, Rutten LJ. (2013). Health Information Seeking on Behalf of Others: Characteristics of 'Surrogate Seekers'. UMass Center for Clinical and Translational Science Research Retreat. Retrieved from https://escholarship.umassmed.edu/cts_retreat/2013/posters/68

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**Health information seeking on behalf of others:
Characteristics of 'surrogate seekers'**

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Funding information:

Dr. Cutrona is supported by Award Number KL2TR000160 from the National Center for Research Resources (NCRR). The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the NCRR or the National Institutes of Health.

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Abstract

Understanding the health information seeking behaviors of surrogate seekers (those who seek health information for others) may guide efforts to reach disadvantaged populations. We used 2011-2012 data from the Health Information National Trends Survey to describe the behaviors of online surrogate seekers. Respondents were asked about their use of the Internet for surrogate seeking over the prior 12 months. Data were weighted to calculate population estimates. Compared to those who sought health information online for only themselves, surrogate seekers were more likely to live in households with others (weighted percent 89.4% vs. 82.5% of self-seekers; $p < 0.05$); no significant differences in gender, race, income or education were observed. Surrogate seekers were more likely to report: visits to social networking sites to read and share about medical topics; participation in online health support groups and downloading of health information to electronic devices. On multivariate analysis, those who had looked online for a healthcare provider were more likely to be surrogate seekers (OR 1.67, 95% CI 1.08-2.59). Our results offer insight for leveraging health communication efforts to reach populations who rely upon surrogate seekers for health information.