

Helping Older Adults Find Reliable Sources of Health Information on the Internet

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Background and Problem

Goal 1, National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy¹ - Develop and disseminate health and safety information that is accurate, accessible, and actionable.

Older adults:

- Often are the target of health scams or quackery; fraudulent health claims are rampant over the Internet.²⁻⁵
- Take multiple prescription⁶ and over-the-counter drugs, supplements, and herbs to manage their health, thus, are at increased risk for drug interactions and adverse side effects.

Project Objectives

To enhance older adults':

- Awareness of websites (e.g., MedlinePlus) that provide reliable and up-to-date information on health, drugs, and dietary supplements
- Knowledge and skills in evaluating the accuracy and reliability of health information websites using a 9-item checklist.

Methodology

Over a 6-week period, MCPHS pharmacy faculty and students presented a 3-lesson series based on Modules 6, 7, and 9 of the *NIH Senior Health Toolkit for Trainers* (www.nihseniorhealth.gov/toolkit/toolkit.html) to older adults at 4 local senior centers. Pre- and post-lesson surveys were used to assess if the project objectives were achieved.

Participants

Lesson	Older adults	Pharmacy students
1	33	10
2	28	7
3	23	9
All	22	8

Helping Older Adults Search for Information Online: A Toolkit for Trainers



Lesson, Title and Length	Lesson Goals
1 - Introduction to MedlinePlus (MP) ~2 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn the main features of the MP Home Page. Learn how to use MP features: Health Topics, Search Box, and Medical Dictionary. Learn about the Quality Guidelines MP uses to select the information it includes on the website. Find answers to health questions of personal interest.
2 - Drugs and Supplements, Medical Encyclopedia ~2 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recall the main features of the MP Home Page. Learn how to use these MP features: Drugs and Supplements and Medical Encyclopedia. Find answers to health questions of personal interest.
3 - Evaluation of Health Websites ~2 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn to recognize and locate these 9 items on a health website: type of website, sponsor, purpose, authors, privacy policy, contact information, reviewers, most recent update, and clues about accuracy.

Results

Awareness/Use of MedlinePlus (MP)			
Lesson	Question - Answer	n	% n
1	Pre: How often do you use MP to find health information (HI)? <i>Never; I have not heard of MP</i>	27	77.8
	Post: How likely are you to use MP to find HI? <i>Very likely/Likely</i>	29	96.6
2	Pre: Since Lesson 1, have you used MP to find HI? <i>Yes</i>	26	73.1
	Post: How likely are you to use MP to find information on drugs and supplements? <i>Very likely/Likely</i>	28	100
3	Pre: Since Lesson 1, how often have you used MP to find HI? <i>Every day/Two times a week</i>	23	60.8
	Post: After the 3 lessons, how likely are you to use MP before using other websites to find HI? <i>Very likely/Likely</i>	22	95.4

Post-Lesson Perception of Usefulness of MP

Lesson	Information Category	n	%
1	Health	29	100
2	Drugs and supplements	28	
1, 2, 3	Health	22	

Results

Confidence in ability to find HI on the Internet

Pre-1: How confident are you?	% (n=29)
<i>Confident</i>	29.6
<i>Somewhat confident</i>	55.6
<i>Not confident at all</i>	14.8
Post-1, -2, -3: After this class, I am more confident. <i>Strongly agree/Agree</i>	100

Confidence in ability to evaluate if HI on the Internet is:

Accurate or correct?	n	% n
Pre-1: How confident are you? <i>Very confident/Confident</i>	27	22.2
<i>Somewhat confident</i>		55.6
<i>Not confident at all</i>		22.2
Post-3: After this class, I am more confident. <i>Strongly agree/Agree</i>	23	100
Reliable or trustworthy?	n	% n
Pre-1: How confident are you? <i>Very confident/Confident</i>	27	14.8
<i>Somewhat confident</i>		63.0
<i>Not confident at all</i>		22.2
Post-3: After this class, I am more confident. <i>Strongly agree/Agree</i>	23	95.6

Conclusion

MedlinePlus offers authoritative, reliable, up-to-date, and free health information in easy-to-understand language. Educating older adults of the website's features and how to navigate it is a strategy for achieving Goal 1 of the *National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy*.

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