Internet Use of Childbearing Women

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What is your research/topic about?

Turning to the internet for all types of information is now common practice. We wanted to know how pregnant women and new mothers use the internet as a source of health information for two reasons. First, as maternal-child nurses, we want to make sure that pregnant and parenting women have access to accurate and helpful health information. Learning where these women go for information, we can help clinical nurses and other health care providers guide women in their search for information about their health and that of their children. Second, as nurse researchers, we wondered if it was feasible to conduct research with this population over the internet. Internet recruitment could yield a more diverse sample, and the internet might be a way to deliver personalized interventions to pregnant and parenting women at a time and location convenient to them.

What impact will your work have on students, the community or others?

Our nursing programs prepare nurses who may work with pregnant and parenting women, so knowledge about how to guide women in seeking reliable information is important for them to practice in today’s health care environment. In the past, women got health information about pregnancy and parenting primarily from books, childbirth education classes, and health care providers at prenatal care visits. Today, women seek information from the internet, which is always available, but may not provide accurate information. Additionally, nurse scientists need new ways to reach healthy pregnant and parenting women. The internet may be a way to recruit them and provide information.

How does your work involve our students?

Undergraduate students can learn to assess popular websites for the quality and credibility of health information they contain, and use this information in their patient teaching. Doctoral students can learn about the ethical and practical considerations of conducting research using the internet.

What would the general public find interesting about your work?

We surveyed 42 women from 8 US states online using email for recruitment and an online survey for data collection. The women were 25-40 years of age, currently pregnant, trying to get pregnant, or had children less than 1 year old. 97% of them reported they used the internet to search for health information about pregnancy or parenting. The most common websites they used were BabyCenter.com, Parenting.com and TheBump.com. In our study, women identified specific reasons for searching the internet that fit into 4 categories: decision-making, anticipatory guidance, connecting, and general information. The category of decision-
making was the most common reason for searching, where women were seeking facts in order to make a decision about health promotion such as pregnancy behaviors, breastfeeding and childcare. In the second category, they were seeking anticipatory guidance about pregnancy and infants—information about milestones and “what to expect” in pregnancy and infancy. Connecting was the third category where women sought to discover what other people were experiencing related to childbearing or parenting. Wanting to hear the experience of others was a social goal and allowed the women to compare their experiences to those of others. The fourth category was general information, where the woman was looking for information unrelated to health issues such as children’s activities or baby names.