Health Online: Finding Information You Can Trust

Final Project Report

PROJECT OVERVIEW

In a world where technology is literally at our fingertips, patients, librarians, healthcare professionals, and consumers looking to find health information are relying more and more on accessing information through the world wide web. But it's accessing that information and having the confidence to find credible health information that has become a concern. According to the 2013 Health Online PEW study, nearly 59% of United States adults were going online to lookup health information. Since that time the use of technology has only increased. What this study did not distinguish was the difference in literacy levels accessing health information online.

From what we know in the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) study, there is a significant difference in the percentage of United States adults proficient in health literacy compared to the percentage of United States adults with below basic health literacy accessing health information online. The NAAL study shows a 47% difference, with only 15% of below base health literacy learners using online resources for health information compared to 62% of proficient health literacy learners. At greatest risk for low health literacy are persons with low education levels, those with linguistic or cultural barriers, the elderly, or those of low socio-economic status.

A Wisconsin Health Literacy (WHL) focus group with people 55 and older conducted at the University of Wisconsin Family Medicine Practice in 2018, found that they preferred to get health information from health professionals like their family doctor. Those under 55 years old preferred to search online for symptoms and use a health portal for doctor interaction. Additionally, a WHL survey of literacy tutors found a significant number of their adult students wish they could do better in finding online information on health symptoms, resources to help them stay healthy, and health information in other languages. Nearly half also wanted help scanning health websites to find what's relevant to them.

From these findings, WHL found the need to develop a curriculum to help seniors and those at risk for low health literacy find reliable health information online. *Health Online: Finding Information You Can Trust*, was created to reach these populations and address the digital divide in accessing and using online resources for health information.

The need for a program like this was evident as technology continues to advance and online resources are being recommended by healthcare professionals and used as a primary tool for navigating health information. To make the program possible, WHL collaborated with many community partners throughout the state of Wisconsin. Community partners included public libraries, non-profit literacy councils, Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs), senior centers, immigrant organizations, and community health centers.

The project had two components:

1) Facilitating thirty two, 90-minute community-based workshops open to anyone 18 years or older.
Project partners who hosted a community-based workshop included:

Baldwin Public Library
Barron County ADRC (Breakfast for the Brain Group)
Bekkum Memorial Library
Cedarburg Library
Central Wisconsin Literacy Council
Cobb Library
Deer Park Public Library
Ellsworth Public Library
Fond du Lac Literacy Services
Greater Waukesha Literacy Council
Hartland Library
Hatch Public Library
Hawkins Public Library
Hudson Public Library
International Institute of Wisconsin
Knutson Memorial Library
L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library
Literacy Network of Dane County (2 workshops)
Literacy Services of Wisconsin (2 workshops)
Madison College
Marinette - Oconto Literacy Council
Menomonie Public Library (2 workshops)
Milwaukee Public Library
Milwaukee Public Library - Villard Square
Ogema Library
Pepin Public Library
Shorewood Public Library
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Watertown Senior and Community Center

2). Facilitating four, two-and-a-half-hour train-the-trainer sessions for library professionals. These included:

IFLS - Inspiring and Facilitating Library Success
Milwaukee County Federated Library System
Racine Public Library
Southwest Wisconsin Library System

Based on the registrations and data collected, there was a total of 336 participants (296 who attended community-based workshop and 40 librarians who attended train-the-trainer session). In addition, approximately 230 professionals from variety of professional backgrounds attended a webinar and presentations at two national conferences. Total project reach was 566 people.

Overall, the project has been successful in reaching a diverse population in Wisconsin, bringing awareness to the importance of looking for credible health information online and how to access and navigate these online resources. 180 participants identified being 55 years or older, 53 identified having low literacy, and 78 identified being an English Language Learner. The project reached 17 different ethnicities in 22 Wisconsin counties.

The project met the following objectives - seeing an increased confidence in finding reliable health information online, identifying ways to check for credibility, learning about resources provided by the National Network of Libraries of Medicine, and exceeding sustainability expectations. The most noted accomplishment was seeing a high demand for the project to be implemented in more libraries throughout the state than the grant allowed. WHL was awarded continued funding for a second phase of the project. The second phase is currently being implemented with an additional 25 community-based workshops and 10 train-the-trainers for library professionals. In addition, the National Institute of Health's (NIH) *All of Us* program has contracted with WHL to implement the project on a national level. The *All of Us* program will be creating an online learning module for library professionals throughout the Unites States to be educated and trained on facilitating the *Health Online: Finding Information You Can Trust* workshop.

IMPACT

The project was successful in delivering helpful materials and learning exercises for workshop and training participants throughout Wisconsin. It had an even larger impact on the messages and information participants learned, as they shared the project resources with other people. With 88.1% of community-based workshop participants and 100% of librarians planning to tell others about at least one resource or tool they learned about in the workshop, the impact is going to spread beyond the 566 people who initially heard about this project.

The project partnered with majority of organizations that had low-resources and served high-risk populations. One of the biggest concerns was the use of technology for future programming. Libraries and some organizations had computers for public use, but did not have a large quantity like the program supplied to deliver a large group presentation. WHL worked with the partnering organizations to come up with alternative solutions to meet the technology capabilities.

Comments shared by participants included:
"I can't assume those coming to the library know how to use online resources or even read books. They may need help." –Racine Public Library

"I have used a computer, but have never searched liked this before. This was really helpful." –Ellsworth Senior Center

"I don't use computers, but my daughter looks stuff up for me. Now I know what to tell her to do and where to go." –Ellsworth Senior Center

"The information presented and the presenters style were both excellent. The presenter was patient and positive, covering everything from website vocabulary to iPad logistics to finding reliable health information." –Ellsworth Public Library

"An excellent program. Always a challenge to get people to attend events. The presenter was easy to understand. Presentation and handouts were clear and concise." –Deer Park Public Library

"All participants were amazed at what they thought they knew, but really didn't. They learned: how to use safe websites – using complete thoughts, not just one word, to find information – to realize the first site listed is not always the best." – Cobb Public Library

This project maintained a focus on supporting the NNLM mission to "improve the public's access to information to enable them to make informed decisions about their health" by helping consumers find and use reliable information. This was a shared vision for all the partnering organizations and WHL. This was achieved by helping participants identify, access, and act on digital health information through workshop content and overcoming barriers.

The project priorities were aligned with the following NNLM-GMR AIMS

- AIM 2 to enhance knowledge and understanding of the network's programs and services,
- AIM 3 to expand and manage the GMR network to enhance services to...librarians....,
- Aim 5 to increase the number of network members actively and effectively participating in NLM programs and services, and most significantly
- AIM 10 to improve consumer understanding of quality information resources available on the Internet....