Broadening Horizons: Consumer Health Information for Vulnerable Populations in the United States

Wendt Character Initiative annotated bibliography
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The focus of my Wendt project is to have students use statistics to understand health disparities in the United States population, as well as to evaluate consumer health information resources. The following resources are related to consumer health literacy and health disparities.


Many consumers use the internet as a primary source for health information. This study examined how consumers evaluate source quality, and found that source attribution had little to no effect on consumers’ perception of quality. Implications for health information providers include the importance of promotion of a high-quality “brand”, which may encourage consumers to visit specific sites or portals rather than using general web searches.


The authors advocate targeted library services for consumers as one way to help alleviate health disparities in the United States. Point of need dissemination through community health workshops, for example, can be one way of effectively disseminating information about health disparities as well as disease prevention and treatment.


This article reviews health promotion web resources which specifically address health disparities of African-Americans with particular concerns, such as heart disease, diabetes, and hypertension. It provides a list of appropriate search terms. The author’s research found that the process required for searching is often lengthy and requires multiple search strategies to be effective.


This powerful book inspired this project. It chronicles the cultural (mis)communication which had a tremendous impact on the health care of a Hmong girl with epilepsy in California. Her family’s experience and the experiences of her doctors and case workers are poignant examples of cultures colliding in the American health care system.

The internet plays a significant role in access to health care information, and this article reviews the literature and discusses nursing implications. There are concerns about electronic health information for consumers, including potential incomplete and inaccurate information. As the authors state, “directing additional resources into e-Health initiatives has the potential to reduce health care cost while improving the health status of patients at the regional and national levels” (p. 287).


This article discusses nationally representative research about cancer communication. The Health Information National Trends Survey (HINTS) included approximately 7000 adults, and investigated health knowledge, risk perception, and information-seeking. Results demonstrate cultural/racial differences in preferences and experiences searching for information about a specific health concern.


The internet serves as a primary source for many consumers’ needed health information. Search engines are viewed by consumers as particularly useful, more than health web portals such as WebMD. Increasingly, consumers are responding with online searching to “direct to consumer” advertising of prescription drugs.


Kreps discusses the connection between racial health disparities and communication systems in health care. Specifically, the author’s literature review focused on communication about cancer prevention, detection, and treatment. The author suggests improvements to health communication systems, such as “culturally tailored message strategies” and personal communication to help alleviate such disparities.


This collection of essays serves as an overview of health informatics as it relates to consumers. Much of the content focuses on the current uses and potential of informatics as a method of empowering consumers and improving care. Enhancing consumer participation in health care decisions is a common theme in the health informatics literature.

Lorence, Park, & Fox undertook research which showed that strategies by which consumers seek health-related information are dependent upon factors including gender, age, race/ethnicity, and internet experience/availability. There is still a “digital divide” that has significant health care implications, so health care providers need to consider consumers’ information sources when making care decisions.


This article also discusses the digital divide that is a nationwide concern when it comes to health information-seeking. The researchers used internet use studies to determine racial differences among health care consumers. Recent programs, primarily governmental initiatives, have been attempting to eliminate the disparities in information access through technology expansion and financial assistance for internet connections.


Wailoo & Pemberton discuss the ethical implications of genetic medicine, focusing on three specific diseases that are traditionally disparate within racial/ethnic groups in the United States. It delves into complex questions of diversity and cultural, social, and medical ethics. Particularly striking are the ideas that advances in genetic science will not benefit all Americans equally and that some groups will actually be disadvantaged by applications of genetics in health care.


This report discusses patient safety implications related to health literacy. The Commission overviews the current health literacy situation among American consumers and focuses on potential changes to policy, as well as effective patient communication systems. Implications and specific strategies for health care providers and consumers are discussed.