

Focused Internet services provide better support to breast cancer patients

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A new study in the *Journal of Communication* reveals that access to an integrated system of internet health resources helps patients more than simply providing a list of URLs to accredited sites.

Breast cancer affects one in eight women and is the second leading cause of cancer death among women. Led by David H. Gustafson of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the study set out to examine what type of access to internet resources would be expected to help newly diagnosed breast cancer patients during these stressful months.

To compare the benefits, 257 breast cancer patients were randomly assigned to three groups. The first group, the control group, received standard care and was given their choice of excellent book or audio-tape breast cancer resources. The second group was given a computer and provided with a list of high-quality websites about breast cancer and training on internet use. The third group received access to CHES, an eHealth system with an integrated set of services related to breast cancer, and training on how to use those specific services.

The patients who received the list of websites did no better than patients in the control group. However, patients in the CHES group fared better on quality of life, perceived social support, and in dealing with health information and healthcare. CHES provided added benefits beyond those of simply the internet.

Access to internet services alone provided patients little or no benefit

over standard care. On the other hand, access to CHESS helped patients more than standard care and was greatest nine months after they received access to the system, suggesting that CHESS had long term effects on their quality of life.

"Healthcare providers should direct people facing serious illness or injury to a single high-quality website that is comprehensive and regularly updated by objective unbiased experts," the authors conclude. "Patients need to be trained to use the websites they are referred to. The sites need to be more inclusive and contain not only information but support services and tools to help patients think through their situation."

Source: Wiley

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