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MINUTE
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Me, Amateur “M.D.”

Consumers, marketers and the healthcare industry are actively writing the latest chapter in the evolving chronicles of consumer control. The explosion of retail healthcare—such as Wal-Mart’s expansion of Redi-Clinics⁽¹⁾—shows how marketers are giving consumers the opportunity to reshape their relationship with the family doctor. But while greater access to healthcare information presents the opportunity for consumers to guide themselves on healthcare decisions, they still face challenges in managing the volume of healthcare information that’s available to them from myriad sources. This week’s MONITOR Minute explores how consumers are pursuing self-directed care—and the information challenges they face as they do so.

Did You Know?



65% of consumers have a great deal of confidence in advice from doctors, but 41% of these “confident” consumers have personally ignored their doctor’s orders.

A Second Opinion, Please

Consumers have become increasingly facile with information, and healthcare information is no exception. The 2007 Yankelovich *Multinational Preventive Health & Wellness Study* shows that almost three-quarters (73%) of all consumers consult with at least two sources of information before making important health decisions. This willingness to find their own “second opinions” comes from consumers’ increasing confidence in being able to locate the information they need when they need it. Alternative sources of information have become less daunting for some consumers—less than half (47%) now say that they are “overwhelmed by all of the sources of information available today,” compared with 54% in 2003.

But while consumers may feel less overwhelmed by information in general, many still feel at a loss when it comes to deciphering the most appropriate information sources for their health. Those who frequently go online to research health/medical information for themselves are more likely to feel overwhelmed by information sources today (52%) than those who don’t frequently go online to do this research (42%). The greater concern for these self-directed “health researchers” shouldn’t be surprising, given that 82% of consumers agree that “there’s so much being written about health these days that it is difficult to know what you should and should not believe.” (MONITOR 2005/2006)

Implications and Opportunities

- **Become both a trusted *provider* and *consolidator* of information.** Continue offering up new ways for consumers to dive deeper on health information, but go beyond just *more* information and give consumers tools they can use to *manage* all of their information sources. Consider new partnerships that provide consumers with one-stop aggregate details on what they need to know about their health.
- **Know your audience.** Serve up new tools and information in a way that meets individual styles and communication preferences, and be sensitive to increasing privacy concerns.
- **What employers can do.** Help your employees sort through the glut of health information by pointing to both internal and external resources for managing that information.
- **What non-traditional health providers can do.** Invest in stepping up your efforts to deliver actionable information about procedures, health and wellness benefits and medical cautions.

Bottom Line

While consumers hunger for more and better information, those looking for the best healthcare information may still need a helping hand to guide them. Provide tools and resources to help them make sense of the array of information sources they have at their fingertips.

Running with It

- **3-D Body Mapping:** IBM researchers have developed software that visually displays health records in 3-D images. The software has been called “Google Earth for the body.”⁽²⁾
- **Microsoft’s HealthVault:** This Web site allows users to create an account to manage their health records, track important health information over time and communicate that information to doctors, etc.
- **Mint.com:** This financial services Web site provides a potential model for health-information providers. The site allows users to consolidate financial information across financial services companies and provides recommendations on how to save money based on the consumer’s patterns of spending, saving and investing.
- **Carol:** Originally launched in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, this Web site allows users to select the medical services they need (such as annual exams) and then compare prices at multiple local healthcare facilities.⁽³⁾

MONITOR Resources

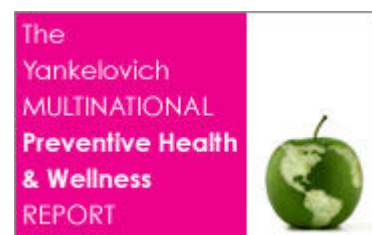
Yankelovich *Multinational Preventive Health & Wellness Study*, 2007

MONITOR 2007/2008 State of the Consumer Report: “Looping”

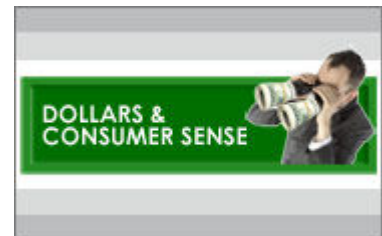
Sources

1. “Wal-Mart Expands In-Store Health Clinics,” Associated Press, 02.07.08

FEATURED PRODUCTS



2. "Visualizing Electronic Health Records with 'Google-Earth for the Body,'" IEEE Spectrum Online, 01.08
3. "Website Lets Consumers Compare Prices for Health Care," USA Today, 02.11.08



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