Mobile Social Networks: Students solving their own health problems

Prajesh Chhanabhai[a], Alec Holt[a], George Benwell[b]

[a] *Health Informatics Group, Department of Information Science, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand*
[b] *Deans Office, School of Business, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand*

Abstract and Objective

This paper describes research in progress. A survey was carried out to determine if Gen Y users are utilizing text messaging as a means of sharing health information with their family and friends. Survey was sent to 5000 students with a response rate of thirty eight percent. (n=1900) Results show that this cohort uses the text message function of their phones to share health information in differing degrees with family and friends and is also affected by the types of condition they are communicating about.

Keywords:

Generation-Y, mhealth, Health sharing

Introduction

The convergence towards the Long Term Evolution (LTE) mobile standard will result in higher data upload and downloads on mobile devices therefore making it an attractive option for healthcare The exponential growth in the use text messages within the Generation Y group is a trend that is observed in all economies. This has introduced a new dimension of sharing health information within this population group. This paper highlights some of the findings that have been recorded to date.

There is currently a global explosion in the penetration rate of mobile phones. Mobile phones are portable, easy to use, affordable and they allow for privacy and confidentiality. Teenagers using new technologies for healthcare information is likely to increase [1-3]. With this in mind, the use of mobile phones can be seen to be the future mechanism for sharing health information.

Aim

To understand health information dissemination within the Generation Y (Gen-Y) group through the advent of Mobile Social Networks.

Methods

As Mobile phone use, Health 2.0 and the uptake of electronic social networks increases it is important to understand in order to plan future health care options available for m-health. To help understand the current stare of health information sharing a survey tool was implemented to collect data for this study. The survey was sent to a population group made up of students that attend the University of Otago. The selection process was random and over 1800 responses were received. Participants were asked about their health sharing behavior using the text messaging capabilities of their mobile phones.

Results

Early indications show approximately 60% share general health information using text messaging with their family. This number decreases when the information is to do with sexual health (2.9%) and mental health (15.6%). When sharing the same information with friends 51% share general health, 9.2% share sexual health and 15.8% share mental health information.

Conclusions

Early indications in this study show that the text message function of mobile phones is actively being used to share health information between, friends family and the general population. Thus, there is a clear need for advice on how best to achieve privacy and confidentiality without jeopardising the usefulness and mobility of sharing health information.

References

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