Health-Related Website Usage by Persons with Serious Mental Illness: Design and Use of a Health Literacy Survey Tool

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THE SURVEY
- A literature review identified scholarly research on website design as well as validated health literacy evaluation tools for persons with SMI that formed the basis of the survey.
- A survey tool of 64 questions was developed using pre-existing, validated health literacy instruments, e.g., DISCERN (Rees, 02)
- Questions sought feedback on format, navigation, usability, and credibility as well as content of each site.
- 20 health-related websites on topics of physical health issues experienced by persons with SMI (cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes, and smoking) were chosen using simple searches through the Google search engine

THE RESULTS
- Highest consistency obtained by Smokefree.gov followed by Wikipedia pages and government websites (e.g., Medline Plus).
- For overall weighted score, Wikipedia, CDC/Cardiovascular Diseases and the Mayo Clinic Heart Diseases pages performed the highest.

1. CONSISTENCY
- Consistency primarily measured formatting of each website (e.g., clear navigation versus unclear whether framed or a small screen)
- Website design accommodations for persons with SMI should be based on the following criteria:
  - Clear, concise, content home page
  - Small number of primary components, each with discrete conceptual grounding
  - Hyperlinks link to next-level content
  - Clear, clear page labeling
  - No or only limited scrolling on each page
  - Separation of "pathway" pages from "content" or "destination" pages (Rotondi, 07)

2. WEIGHTED SCORES
- Weighted scores reward overall score including content questions (e.g., is data presented in a way that supports the likelihood of developing the condition based on these risk factors?)
- Reviewers consistency scoring matched formatting guidelines for SMI users recommended in existing research
- Provided clear guidance as to initial design methodology for the next phase of this project – creation of a health literacy training website designed for persons with serious mental illness

DISCUSSION
- The project demonstrated:
  - The successful creation and use of a survey instrument designed to evaluate websites with the framework of best-practice usage for persons with SMI
  - Reviewers consistency scoring matched formatting guidelines for SMI users recommended in existing research
- Provided clear guidance as to initial design methodology for the next phase of this project – creation of a health literacy training website designed for persons with serious mental illness

PROJECT TEAM
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REFERENCES