

Searching for health information in rural Canada: Where do residents look for health information and what do they do when they find it?

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Introduction: People living in rural areas may face specific barriers to finding useful health-related information, and their use of information may differ from their urban counterparts.

Method: This random-digit dial telephone survey of 253 people (75% female) living in a rural, medically under-serviced area of Ontario, Canada, follows-up a previous interview study to examine with a larger sample issues related to searching for and using health information.

Analysis: Descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample and the distribution of responses to each question. Sex differences on key questions were analysed using the Chi-squared (χ^2) test.

Results: Respondents were as likely to find information on the Internet as from doctors, although several reported that they had no access to these resources. Many of those surveyed used the information they found to look after themselves or someone else, to decide whether to seek assistance from a professional health care provider, and/or to make treatment decisions. Echoing results from other studies, a significant proportion of women reported that they did not discuss the information they'd found with a doctor.

Conclusions: These findings have implications for Canadian government health policy, particularly the use of e-health strategies.