Predictors of Internet Health Information Seeking Behaviors among Young Adults Living with HIV Across the United States

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Consistent with young adults' penchant for digital communication, young adults living with HIV use digital communication media to seek out health information. Understanding the types of health information sought online and the characteristics of these information-seeking young adults is vital when designing digital health interventions for them. This study aims to describe characteristics of young adults living with HIV who seek health information through the internet. Results will be relevant to digital health interventions and patient education. Young adults with HIV (aged 18-34 years) self-reported internet use during an evaluation of digital HIV care interventions across 10 demonstration projects in the United States (N=716). Lasso (least absolute shrinkage and selection operator) models were used to select characteristics that predicted whether participants reported seeking general health and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information on the internet during the past 6 months. Almost a third (211/716, 29.5%) and a fifth (155/716, 21.6%) of participants reported searching for general health and SRH information, respectively; 26.7% (36/135) of transgender young adults with HIV searched for gender-affirming care topics. Areas under the curve (>0.70) indicated success in building models to predict internet health information seeking. Consistent with prior studies, higher education and income predicted health information seeking. Higher self-reported antiretroviral therapy adherence, substance use, and not reporting transgender gender identity also predicted health information seeking. Reporting a sexual orientation other than gay, lesbian, bisexual, or straight predicted SRH information seeking. Young adults living with HIV commonly seek both general health and SRH information online, particularly those exploring their sexual identity. Providers should discuss the most commonly sought SRH topics and the use of digital technology and be open to discussing information found online to better assist young adults with HIV in finding accurate information. Characteristics associated with health information-seeking behavior may also be used to develop and tailor digital health interventions for these young adults.

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