



FEDERATION OF AMERICAN CONSUMERS AND TRAVELERS - NEWS RELEASE -

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Role of the Internet in Today's Medical Care

EDWARDSVILLE, IL, April 6, 2010 - Published in the March 4 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, a survey of nearly 16,000 people over seven years found that:

- People's trust in physicians has increased with the ascent of the Internet, while their trust in Internet information has declined slightly over time. Simultaneously, their trust in other sources of health information such as television has plummeted.
- By a large margin, people take their health questions to the Internet first, performing their own research. Then they take that information to their doctor for discussion.
- Increasing numbers of people are using e-mail to communicate with their physicians directly.

The study dovetails with previous research showing that the Internet is not replacing the role of doctors in people's health, said Susannah Fox, an associate director of the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project.

Some people had been concerned that the Internet would supplant people's need to visit the doctor, much as Web sites have replaced local travel agents and print newspapers for many. This latest research reveals the opposite is occurring.

"There are some institutions that will not budge," Fox said. "The doctor's appointment is an institution that will not budge. People still want someone to help guide them when they're making decisions about an acute disease or managing a chronic illness."

However, the study also shows that people are getting some use from Internet-provided medical information. They are using the Internet as a first source for health questions, for one thing. Also, people also are using Web sites to get answers for questions they feel are too minor to bring to their doctor.

The increase in e-mail correspondence with physicians, along with a decrease in people's trust in other sources of information, point to an increasing role the Internet will have in health care.

The findings also point to an evolving model of preventive medical care where a person's family physician takes on the role of a "coach," guiding self-motivated patients to better health through their advice and judgment.

This news release has been issued by the Federation of American Consumers and Travelers (FACT), a consumer organization formed under the not-for-profit corporation laws of the District of Columbia in 1984. FACT serves more than 1 million consumers nationwide. Additional information on FACT may be found in the Encyclopedia of Associations, and by visiting the association's Web site (www.usafact.org). Informative, unbiased news bulletins are regularly disseminated by FACT to help its members remain current on matters which might seriously impact their lives. The association does not offer support to -- and does not receive support from -- any political party or movement. In addition to publishing consumer-related reports, the association provides more than 30 benefits for its members, ranging from medical insurance and dental discounts to prescription drug savings and scholarships. FACT's administrative office is located at 318 Hillsboro Avenue, Edwardsville, IL 62025

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