The Center for Research and Outreach

Putting Research to Work
for Military Families

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Focus:
Multiple Branches

Attitudes and Awareness of Web-Based Self-Care Resources in the Military: A Preliminary Survey Study

SUMMARY: Several self-care web-based resources are available online, and patients may find these resources useful as a quick source of information or as a supplement to an appointment with a physician. Service members and health providers were surveyed regarding their use of self-care websites and their attitudes toward using these resources. A majority of providers and sizable minority of Service members use web-based self-care resources and feel they are valuable.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Most Service members had home internet access (96%), and many reported using web-based content to learn about physical (44%) and mental (21%) health concerns.
- The majority of providers reporting using self-care websites as part of patients' physical (85%) and mental (56%) health care.
- WebMD.com, MilitaryOneSource.com, and VA.gov were the websites providers most commonly used and recommended.
- Service members reported using self-care websites for gaining instant access to information and for making decisions about seeing a provider for physical or mental concerns, but they reported feeling face-to-face provider information was more credible than web-based information.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:
Programs could:
- Provide workshops to Service members and their families to teach self-care practices and provide demonstrations
- Disseminate a list of evidence-based self-care websites for distribution to Service members and their families and teach military families how to find credible web-based health information
- Educate Service members and their families regarding where free public internet access is available (e.g.,libraries, community centers)

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:
Policies could:
- Collaborate with creators of self-care websites to include information about self-care specifically for military families
- Encourage military programs to supplement self-care courses with additional information and resources for military families from recommended self-care websites
- Recommend professional development for providers working with military families about how to responsibly integrate self-care websites into their practice

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METHODS

- Service members were recruited at a personnel administrative center at a large military installation.
- Providers were sent surveys via interoffice mail with a 26% survey response rate.
- Associations between participants' self-reported internet usage, attitudes about web-based resources, and comfort or willingness to use web-based self-care resources were examined.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 48 Service members (83% male) with an average age of 30.50 years (SD = 8.20); the majority were Active Duty (94%) and enlisted (83%) personnel.
- Service members identified as White (60%), Latino (19%), Black (13%), Asian American (4%), and Native American (2%).
- The 27 providers who participated included medical doctors (48%), nurse practitioners or physician assistants (22%), psychologists (22%), social workers (4%), and counselors (4%).

LIMITATIONS

- The response rate of providers was only 26%, and those that participated may differ from those that did not.
- The survey measures had not been previously validated and may have resulted in inaccurate findings.
- Other variables may have impacted use of health-care websites, such as providers' years of practice or Service members' access to private internet use time.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate the effectiveness of integrating web-based self-care information into military education programs for families
- Compare use of self-care websites via computer and cell phone
- Examine patients' awareness of self-care websites and which websites are most frequently used

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS

Design
★★☆
Appropriate
Research Plan
and Sample

Methods
★★☆
Appropriate
Measurement
and Analysis

Limitations
★★☆
Few

For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works