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Online Social Support and Privacy Risks: Protecting Personal Health Information in the Digital Age

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While online communities for social support continue to grow, more research is needed about personal health information collection and potential privacy risks for participants using health social networking sites. This presentation will report the findings of a privacy policy analysis and the information collection practices for 25 online cancer communities. Given that many people utilize health social networking sites, the study's findings provide insight into an array of privacy-related issues. These privacy concerns are relevant to nurses connecting individuals with supportive resources. In particular, implications for privacy, confidentiality, consumer choice, and data safety in online environments will be highlighted. These findings can also help build awareness of privacy-related issues in online support communities among nurses, nursing students, and other health professionals. Overall, nurses and other health professionals can utilize these findings to encourage individuals seeking online support and participating in social networking sites to build awareness of privacy risks to better protect their personal health information in the digital age.

Biography

Deborah H. Charbonneau is an Associate Professor in the School of Information Sciences at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. She earned her PhD in Medical Sociology from Wayne State University. She currently teaches in the areas of Health Informatics and Research Methods. Dr. Charbonneau has been an invited speaker at local, national, and international conferences on the topic of information privacy. Her articles have appeared in the Journal of Women & Aging, Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health, and CIN: Computers, Informatics, Nursing.

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