

Explaining Health Information Seeking Behaviors among U.S. and German Residents

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Abstract

Patients' participation in health care requires comprehensive health knowledge and can benefit from health information seeking behaviors (HISB). However, since evidence on HISB from countries other than the United States is sparse and patients' participation is a cross-border challenge, this study takes a cross-country comparative perspective on HISB. The study identifies country-specific patterns of personal, health(care)-related, and cognitive determinants of HISB using data from the Health Information National Trends Survey instrument conducted both in the U.S. and Germany. In both countries HISB is very common. Whereas U.S. residents prefer to turn to the Internet for information, German residents are more interested in interpersonal exchange with health professionals. Regarding the determinants, personal and health(care)-related factors contributed to HISB in both countries, whereas cognitive factors were relevant predictors for German respondents' HISB only. A common enhancing influencing factor of HISB found in both countries was the quality of patient-provider communication. A common challenge and barrier for health promotion and prevention in both countries is to motivate HISB of individuals with lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Knowing about similarities and differences can help to pinpoint problems in health information provision and prompt a search for ways to improve health care.

Keywords: health information seeking behaviors (HISB); cross-country comparison; health information national trend survey (HINTS); sociodemographic factors; socioeconomic factors; health care-related factors; cognitive factors