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eHealth Traffic Critically Dependent on Search Engines and Portals

Most of the 100 million people who look for health information online do so using a portal or search engine. Only a quarter go directly to an eHealth site.

The traffic on individual eHealth sites is critically dependent on how quickly and easily they are found and listed by portals and search engines. Almost 100 million adults go online to look for health care information (Harris Interactive calls them “Cyberchondriacs”). On average, they do so three times a month. Mostly they navigate these sites using a portal or search engine rather than going directly to a particular site. Only one in four go directly to an eHealth site.

These are the results of a nationwide Harris Interactive survey of 675 adults who are online from home, office, school, library or some other location. Respondents were surveyed by telephone between March 22 and 26, 2001.

Key findings of this survey include:

- 75% of all adults online (47% of all adults) use the Internet to look for health care information. However, only 16% say they do this “often”, while most do so “sometimes” (30%), or “hardly ever” (30%)
- This 75% of all those online amounts to just under 100 million adults nationwide.
- On average those who look for health care information online do so 3.3 times every month. This varies from 6.1 times among heavy Internet users to 1.3 times among light users.
- A slender 52% majority of those who look for health care information do so using a portal or search engine that allows them to search for the health information they seek across many different websites. About a quarter (24%) go directly to a site that focuses only on health-related topics and one in six (16%) go first to a general site that focuses on many topics that may have a section on health issues.

More heavy Internet users (57%) and medium users (56%) than light users (44%) use a search engine or a portal.

These Harris Interactive data, taken from *The Harris Poll*, show that the Internet continues to be used by huge, and growing, numbers of the public interested in getting information about particular diseases or treatments or about staying healthy. The results also demonstrate the critical importance to health care websites of being quickly and easily accessible to search engines and portals.

TABLE 1

Frequency of Accessing Health Care Information Online: 1998-2000

“How often do you look for information online about health topics – often, sometimes, hardly ever or never?”

Base: Have access to Internet

	June/July 1998 %	June 1999 %	March 2001 %
Often	12	13	16
Sometimes	30	30	30
Hardly ever	29	31	30
Never	29	26	25
Total who have ever looked for health or medical information	71	74	75

TABLE 2

Cyberchondriacs: Trends

	June/July 1998 %	June 1999 %	March 2001 %
% of all adults who are online*	38	46	63
% of all those online who have looked for health information	71	74	75
% of all adults who have looked for health information online	27	34	47
Numbers of adults who have looked for health information online	54 million	69 million	97 million

* Includes those online from home, office, school, library or other location

TABLE 3

Frequency of Looking for Health Care Information in the Last Month

“About how many times have you looked for information online about health care topics in the last month?”

Base: Ever look for health care information online

	“Cyberchondriacs”			
	Total	Heavy	Medium	Light
Mean (average)	3.3	6.1	2.7	1.3
Median	1.2	1.9	1.1	-

***Heavy Internet users** were online 8 hours or more in the last week.
Light Internet users were online less than 3 hours in the last week.

TABLE 4

Where People Go to Look for Health Care Topics Online

“The last time you looked for information online about a health topic where did you FIRST go to get the information your were interested in? Did you FIRST go to a...?”

Base: Ever look for health care information online

	“Cyberchondriacs”			
	Total %	Heavy* %	Medium* %	Light* %
Site that focuses only on health-related topics OR	24	23	25	23
A site that focuses on many subjects that may have a section devoted to health issues, OR	16	14	13	25
A portal or search engine which will allow you to search for health information across many different sites	52	57	56	44
Not sure/refused	7	7	6	8

***Heavy Internet users** were online 8 hours or more in the last week.

Light Internet users were online less than 3 hours in the last week.

For additional information about consumer awareness, usage and satisfaction of eHealth websites, contact Harris Interactive to learn more about **Harris Interactive OnSiteSM**. More than **100,000** interviews are conducted semi-annually among consumers who look for health and medical information on the Web. Onsite explores how different consumer segments (including those with specific chronic illnesses) use the Internet to access health and medical information.

About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive (Nasdaq: HPOL), the global leader in online market research, uses Internet-based and traditional methodologies to provide its clients with critical knowledge concerning the views, experiences, behaviors and attitudes of people worldwide. Known for *The Harris Poll*, Harris Interactive has 45 years of experience in providing its clients with market research and polling services including custom, multi-client and service bureau research, as well as customer relationship management services. Harris Interactive acquired the custom research group of Yankelovich Partners in February 2001. Through its U.S. and Global Network offices, Harris Interactive conducts research around the world, in multiple, localized languages, using its proprietary technology to survey its database of more than 7 million online panelists. For more information about Harris Interactive, please visit the Company’s website at www.harrisinteractive.com
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