

**Student Presentations/Roundtable Discussions**  
**Position Paper**

***e-Health Communication:***  
**Contexts, Conditions and Communication in e-Health**

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March 2005

The nature and value of e-health is grounded in our ability to communicate effectively. As a communicative process discourses of health and illness are being played out on a virtual stage that has captured our attention with the promises and pitfalls of advocating and employing information communication technology (ICT). For those of us eager to explore this new frontier there are many questions to be answered regarding how the pragmatic and poetic nuances of health and illness are communicated under the umbrella of e-health.

From a health communications perspective a guiding question for determining the values, priorities and methods that best define e-health asks, "How is e-health making a difference?" Continued advances in ICTs and growing e-health applications bring opportunity and responsibility to improve practical and theoretical knowledge regarding how health and illness information is best communicated. Great strides have been made to determine the value of clinical and social applications, e.g. online support groups, provider-patient communication. However, a focused investment in determining the communicative contexts and conditions of e-health as it is practiced in everyday interactions will afford us valuable perspectives on the social and personal impact of e-health on attitudes, decisions, and behaviours about health and illness.

Informed by communications theory and guided by ethnographic methods, e-health communications research demands an analytic flexibility that allows for movement between considerations of broad social circumstances as well as considerations of how e-health is communicated in everyday situations. Using ethnographic methods such as narrative analysis, participatory action research, usability testing and content analysis we may define the communicative contexts and conditions of e-health. Ideally, a broad process model of e-health communication will emerge as a practical resource for advancing applications of clinical care, understanding the impacts of e-health on individual agency and outlining best-practices for communicating about health and illness.

## **Abstract for Poster Presentation**

### **Sharing Stories and Support Online: A Study of Narrative Resources and Identity in an Online Support Group for Multiple Sclerosis**

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#### **Abstract**

Communicating about illness has reached epidemic proportions. Our attention is repeatedly drawn to stories of illness via media, the Internet and personal experience. Stories of illness carry powerful messages about how a person *does* illness. Embedded in personal stories about illness are larger cultural ways of talking about illness and numerous other narrative resources that are drawn upon to *story* identity. This study examines the ways members of a social support group for multiple sclerosis draw upon socially meaningful narrative resources to communicate about their illness experiences and accomplish their identities online. Positioned at a narrative intersection where cultural resources for storying the self meet with ongoing narrative practices of everyday talk, we are afforded a view of larger narrative resources that are drawn upon as group members share stories and support online. In this study we consider the way narrative resources are practiced in everyday talk to accomplish identity.