Using WebTV™ to deliver health information into the home: Experiences, Successes and Regrets

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Commercial consumer electronics provide inexpensive, easy-to-use devices that solve some of the problems of insuring access to WWW-based health information resource by lay people. Using WebTV™ persons recovering from cardiac surgery connect to a WWW-based cardiac rehabilitation service. In this demonstration participants will manipulate the WebTV device, view the HeartCare resource, and learn of our experiences in usability, design and training considerations.

Introduction
The rapid growth of health information resources on the Internet, particularly that accessible via browsers and World Wide Web technology, portends great benefit for ill persons, their family caregivers, and the public at large. Health information on the WWW can augment traditional health care services, providing patients with simple explanations and step-wise descriptions of home care procedures. Additionally, WWW resources are an important source of learning about the experiences of others who share similar health concerns. One key challenge to achieving these benefits lies in insuring that the computer technologies needed to access WWW-based health resources are available to the general public.

We developed HeartCare, a WWW-based cardiac surgery recovery resource for the post-discharge period through six months after surgery. HeartCare provides time-sequenced coaching information tailored to the health needs and information preferences of individual patients. HeartCare also supports e-mail and bulletin board communication among patients and a mechanism to contact a nurse.

We selected WebTV as the home-based device to connect participants with the HeartCare resource. WebTV service consists of an in-home device that connects to the Internet via telephone lines and displays WWW pages on a commercial television. The service employs a proprietary browser.

Experience to date
The WebTV device is acceptable to patients. Training time to use the system ranges from 30-90 minutes, and is accomplished in a single session. Design challenges arise from the difference in display characteristics between WebTV and more familiar computer-based browsers such as Netscape.