Socialized Medicine

Today, this may mean visiting virtual communities online for health care info.

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Twenty years ago, you could only have your health care needs met by going to the doctor. Today, there are oodles more options. People can click online and find all kinds of health information: disease diagnoses, treatment news, physician reviews or groups of people eager to offer support. But as individuals' health care requirements become both more specific and diverse, so must those tools used by the industry to meet the needs of these audiences.

This was the mission of "i know," the recently launched social media campaign by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that uses Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to get its message out. "Our goal is to find out where young people are having a dialogue, and go where they are online," says Booker Daniels, a CDC health communications specialist for the campaign. "The purpose of 'i know' is to increase discussions about important HIV-related topics and normalize that conversation."

Previously, the CDC used Second Life—the popular video game-like virtual world—to hold health fairs. The American Cancer Society also experimented with the format and announced plans to open a virtual office in Second Life, according to a *Wall Street Journal* article.

But while cyberspace boasts a wealth of sites that feature support groups and forums, you should always be cautious about what you post online and how much information you share. Remember: Everything you post is available for anyone to see.

Also remember: There is no substitute for meeting people face-to-face or getting medical advice from a trained, licensed physician.

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http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/Socialized-Medicine-RHSUMMER2010-18454-6114