

How People Find Doctors Online

By [David Erickson](#), Director of e-Strategy

While word-of-mouth and face-to-face, peer-to-peer recommendations are the most likely way that prospective patients find doctors, people are increasingly going on online and turning to their social networks to find physicians.

The key point for medical professionals to keep in mind, however, is that most online health care research is done by someone else on behalf of the patient.

This is likely due to the current demographics of Internet users; those who are most likely to need medical assistance (the elderly) are the least likely demographic segment to use online tools. It is also likely due to the fact that sick people may be too ill to conduct their own research.

It is important, then, for medical professionals to know [the demographics of online health seekers](#): They will most likely be affluent, college-educated, white Millennial or Gen X women. The demographics of keyword searches highlights just this fact: [63% of the searches for Podiatrist](#) are conducted by women; [65% of the searches for Orthopedic Doctor](#) are conducted by women; and [62% of the searches for Orthopedic Surgeon](#) are conducted by women.

Search is the go-to source for most bodies of knowledge these days and health is no exception. For health care, the search process is long and complicated, typically beginning with people seeking to understand a specific malady by searching for information about the illness or its symptoms, and proceeding to treatments and cures.

[According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project](#), 80% of internet users have looked online for information about any of 15 health topics such as a specific disease or treatment. [Forty-four percent have looked for doctors](#) or other professionals and thirty-six percent have looked for hospitals or other medical facilities.

But in addition to search, people are also beginning to turn to social media for health information. [According to Pew](#):

- 34% of internet users have read someone else's commentary or experience about health or medical issues on an online news group, website, or blog.
- 23% of social network site users have followed their friends' personal health experiences or updates on the site.
- 16% of internet users have consulted online rankings or reviews of doctors or other providers.
- 15% of internet users have consulted online rankings or reviews of hospitals or other medical facilities.



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Lastly, people will discuss their medical issues or those of their loved ones on social networks, [such as complaining about snoring on Twitter](#), and they'll specifically ask for recommendations for doctors from their social networks, as this stream of Facebook status updates demonstrates:

[Open Facebook Status Search for:](#)



[More results](#)

All of these behaviors, from search to social, present opportunities for medical professionals to build trust among likely potential patients. Trust is the crucial ingredient in turning a potential patient into an actual one; the right content strategy can do just that.

David Erickson is Director of e-Strategy at Tunheim. Follow him on Twitter: [@derickson](#). David publishes a daily newsletter of his communications insights called The Daily Numbers. Subscribe below:

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