

For immediate release

January 12, 2012

Contact: Will Reed, President, Technology For All (713) 454-6400

For immediate assistance contact Julie Stuckey - 713.454.6483

A Dose of Digital: TFA students' lives reflect studies over healthcare and Internet access

According to *Health Topics* and other recent studies from the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, using the Internet for health-related activities—research, support and more—is increasingly popular in the U.S. According to the study, the number of Internet users searching online for health information has remained constant, at eight in 10 users. Correspondingly, technology is used to enhance health care on every level.



“Even now, you sign in with a computer when you go to the doctor’s office,” says Nina, a student in one of 16 Texas Connects Coalition public computer centers located in Houston. With a Broadband Technology Opportunities Program grant, Technology For All (TFA) partnered with Austin Free-Net to provide over 60 public computer centers offering digital access and literacy to underserved Texans.

But there’s a disparity of access and usage, including with senior citizens. 40% of U.S. citizens over 64 used the Internet, and only 29% used the Internet for health research. *New Vital Sign: Degree of Patient’s Online Access*, an American Medical News article discussing *Health Topics*, quotes Susannah Fox, associate director of the Pew Internet & American Life project and author of the report: “Patients older than 65 are least likely to be online, yet they are the highest users of health care and are most likely to be managing chronic illnesses.”

Technology For All sees the reality of Fox’s findings in our public computer centers. Senior citizen students at our New Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church public computer center joined our free computer basics classes when they realized the encroaching role technology plays on everyday life—including health care.

“Even the doctor sends you an email with your results,” says Johnnie Mae. Recently, she had waited for test results to arrive in the mail, as usual. They never came. When she called her doctor, she was told the results were emailed to an account her daughter had set up for her. “I had to ask my daughter for help checking my email.”

The experience was a wakeup call—“You don’t exist if you’re not online,” she says—leading to TFA’s basic computer course. When fellow student Edwardleen fought breast cancer, M.D. Anderson invited her to join myMDAnderson, an online communication and information service for patients and physicians. She wasn’t computer-confident enough to sign up, she says, “but I regret it. It was convenient—they had my medical history, I could schedule appointments, do everything.”



The students are excited to catch up, but not everyone else may even be aware of a gap. According to the report, “With the exception of adults age 70 and older and those with less than a high school education, internet use has shifted from being exceptional to being commonplace.” Due to the essentiality of healthcare, this possibility sets a serious precedence. *New Vital Sign* sums it up: “Susannah Fox ...

said if there's a need for up-to-date health care information, such as drug recalls or information that could affect treatment choices, physicians should be aware that not everyone will see it if it's disseminated online.”

Source: American Medical News—[New Vital Sign: Patient's degree of online access](#)

Pew Internet & American Life Project—[Health Topics](#)

###

Technology For All (TFA) is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization whose mission is to empower under-resourced communities through the tools of technology. By working together with local community-based organizations, corporations, foundations, technology providers and public entities, TFA creates educational, economic and personal opportunities for low-income persons and the communities in which they live. TFA's offices are located in Houston's East End at 2220 Broadway, Houston, Texas 77012. For more information, visit www.techforall.org; call 713-454-6400