

Foreword

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In 2001, the National Cancer Institute (NCI) initiated the Health Information National Trends Survey (HINTS), the first-ever survey to collect nationally representative information on the American public's need for, access to, and use of cancer information. The launching of HINTS was one component of a larger NCI initiative designed to accelerate progress in the science of cancer communication—the Institute's Extraordinary Opportunity in Cancer Communication, described in *The Nations Investment in Cancer Research for Fiscal Year 2002: Plans & Priorities for Cancer Research*. The survey, which is currently conducted every two years, provides unique information about how messages on cancer prevention, detection, diagnosis, treatment, and survivorship are being received by the public. The acronym suggests its purpose: to provide important insights, or hints, into the health information needs and practices of the American public.

Led by Dr. Bradford W. Hesse, Chief of NCI's Health Communication and Informatics Research Branch, along with an outstanding team of investigators within and outside NCI, the survey provides an invaluable snapshot of how adults use the myriad information resources around them to learn about cancer and lead healthier lives.

In early 2004, NCI made public our dataset from the first survey, and, since then, numerous researchers have used HINTS to analyze how people use mass media, the Internet, and personal channels for health information purposes. HINTS reflects NCI's commitment to public data sharing and dissemination by making the science of cancer communication easily accessible to multiple audiences.

This special issue of the *Journal of Health Communication* includes key research findings from data generated by the first HINTS in the areas of cancer knowledge, cognition, risk perception, information seeking, and communication. The articles describe findings from collaborative research and analyses that will serve as invaluable educational resources for health communication specialists in tailoring of materials, pilot attempts to reduce the digital divide, and studies that increase our understanding of information-seeking behaviors and preferences.

Understanding the American public's awareness and use of cancer-related information is essential to our goal to eliminate suffering and death due to cancer. We look forward to continued collaboration with researchers and practitioners to use HINTS to improve our cancer communication strategies and hope that this special issue will help to inform your own work in communication science.

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