Texting initiative expands to reinforce healthy teen behavior

Baylor College of Medicine
HOUSTON -- (September 15, 2010) -- Teens today communicate in a different way than in the past, and physicians and staff at the Baylor Teen Health Clinic [1] are taking advantage of these new communication methods to reach their patients. "Teenagers are more attached to their phones than ever before but they are not necessarily talking on them. Instead, they are texting and using their phones to access the Internet," said Dr. Peggy Smith, director of the Baylor Teen Health Clinic and professor in the department of obstetrics and gynecology at BCM.

Strategy includes appointments, health topics The Teen Health Clinic launched an initiative to communicate with patients through these avenues and now propose expanding their efforts to include texting appointment reminders and other important health information to more of its patients.

"The Teen Health Clinic is constantly searching for innovative strategies to reinforce healthy behaviors, and we're using a venue that teens are comfortable with, which is very effective," said Ruth Buzi, director of social services for the clinic and a BCM assistant professor in obstetrics and gynecology.

Teens who visit the clinic can give their written consent to receive texts from the clinic. They receive reminders of their appointments as well as texts about topics such as the importance of using condoms and being screened for sexually transmitted diseases. Adolescents can also text questions as well as requests for appointment reminders.

Goal to reduce sexual, nonsexual risks

This effort launched last year at two of the Teen Health Clinic locations, and will soon expand to three more sites, Smith said. Texts are sent out twice each week.

"We're very excited about this texting initiative, and we hope it can help reduce both sexual and nonsexual risks," Smith said.

Evidence has shown relationships between behaviors like smoking and alcohol use and teen sex, so Smith said it's important that the text messages also focus on nonsexual behaviors. Some examples of text messages that have been sent by the clinic include:

- Remember Your ABCs … Abstinence, Being faithful, Consistently & correctly using condoms.
- Did you know that you are 23 times more likely to have an accident because

of text messaging while you are driving?
- Did you know that by the time most people are 19 years old, they have had 2 or more sexual partners?
- Did you know that the three most commonly contracted STDs are Chlamydia, gonorrhea, and HPV? Protect yourself and remember your ABCs!
- Did you know that the rates for HIV and STDs are highest for African American males and females?

The texting efforts follow the clinic's revamped website, which includes a blog and videos on sexual health topics, among other teen-oriented features. The teen health clinic has also established a presence on social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter.

The clinic's technology initiatives were made possibly by a grant from the World Health and Golf Association.

SOURCE [2]

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http://www.mdtmag.com/news/2010/09/texting-initiative-expands-reinforce-healthy-teen-behavior?qt-recent_content=0

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[1] http://www.teenhealthclinic.org
[2] http://www.bcm.edu/news/item.cfm?newsID=2745&r=1