

## Plenary Lecture: YLMP 2010

### **Analysing health communication: The intersection of linguistics and medicine in adolescent health care**

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In this lecture I will present findings from recent interdisciplinary research which focuses on adolescent health language through the relatively new medium of computer-mediated-communication (CMC). Over the past decade there has been a considerable rise in the use of the internet for the provision of health advice and information by qualified medical professionals. The anonymous nature of internet communication is particularly appealing to young people who may be reluctant to discuss sensitive matters with a health care provider in face-to-face interaction. The success of interactive, reputable health care websites aimed at adolescents provides a clear indication of growing demand for on-line professional health advice.

The data analysis focuses in particular upon *The Teenage Health Freak*, a UK-based website run by two general practitioners who have considerable experience and expertise when dealing with adolescent health concerns. A number of research questions have been devised in conjunction with these doctors to explore both the language that is used by young people seeking advice and the linguistic strategies adopted by the doctors themselves when giving advice.

The benefit of linguists working directly with health care practitioners will be highlighted, along with the advantages of taking a mixed-methodological approach which combines discourse analysis with corpus linguistics. The linguistic analysis demonstrates the growing importance of CMC as an effective medium through which health advice can be transmitted. The findings also highlight how we can gain a detailed understanding of young people's knowledge of health issues, as well as illustrating how essential health care advice can be quickly and effectively disseminated to a wide audience through CMC.