

## **Computer-mediated adolescent health communication:**

### **Local and global audiences**

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This paper will report on the findings of an applied linguistic study examining the communicative strategies of adolescents in computer-mediated health care communication. This collaborative project combines the expertise of linguists and general practitioners working on data taken from a 2 million word longitudinal corpus entitled *Teenage Health Freak*.

The advent of the Internet has enabled healthcare advice to be delivered in a wide variety of communicative formats. One distinct advantage of computer-mediated-communication is that, as well as delivering advice locally, in response to a request for advice from a particular individual, the open web forum results in the advice being simultaneously presented to a global audience, enabling general practitioners to communicate invaluable information on adolescent health concerns to a wide, disparate number of addressees. In particular the *Teenage Health Freak* website is a reputable, dedicated health advice forum where adolescents communicate their health concerns via written text to request medical advice from a qualified general practitioner.

A variety of tools and techniques taken from computerised textual analysis, including corpus linguistics, are applied to the data set, comprising messages submitted to the website over a six year period, in order to identify specific linguistic patterns of use. We will document the range of techniques and strategies that are being developed in order to make the findings of our linguistic analyses of practical benefit to health care practitioners, educators, parents, and to adolescents themselves. This includes the production of an encyclopaedic resource based on corpus linguistic analysis of lexical patterns and the production of a dedicated website which documents the key linguistic findings.