

Health Communication and the Internet: An Analysis of Adolescent Language Use on the *Teenage Heath Freak* Website

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Adolescent health care

- Primary care: GPs and adolescents: Communication barriers exist
 - Fear of confidentiality breaches
 - Embarrassment

(Jacobson et al. 2001; McPherson 2005)



Teenage Health Freak Website

Provides complete anonymity and confidential advice

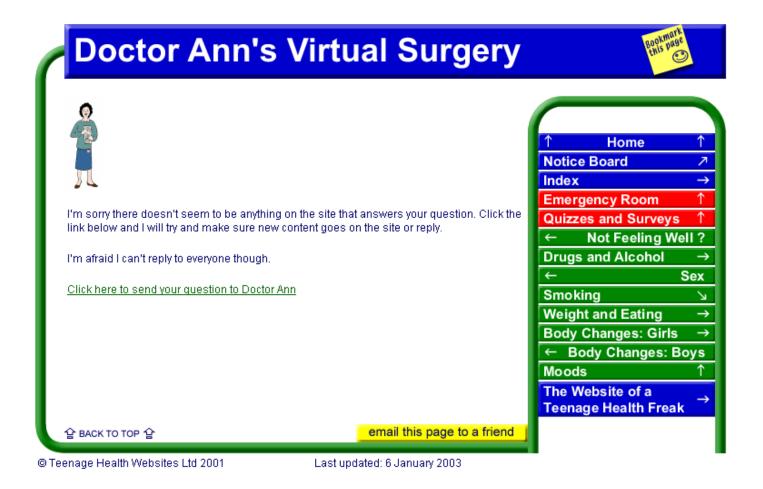
Popularity: 52,864 visits per day

www.teenagehealthfreak.org

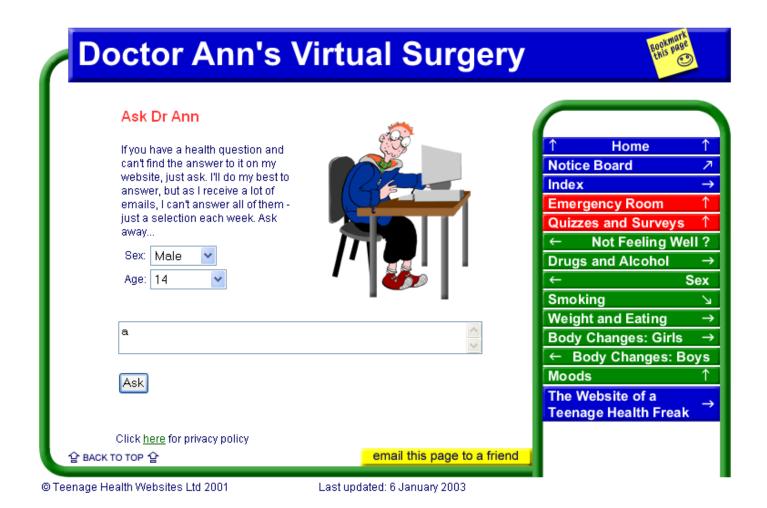
Homepage of the Teenage Health Freak Website



Introducing Dr Ann



Doctor Ann's Virtual Surgery





Methodology

A quantitative corpus approach

- Word frequencies
- Keywords words which occur with a statistically greater frequency in the teenage health emails than in our general reference corpus



Corpus Summary

	All	Male	Female
Total Messages	113,481	41,830 (37%)	59,885 (53%)
Total Words	2,194,418	659,964 (30%)	1, 427976 (65%)
Avg. Words per Message	19	15	23

Frequencies of top 20 keywords in the 'teenage health email' corpus

N	Key word	Freq.	%	Keyness
1	I	154,207	6.96	422,351.34
2	MY	59,777	2.70	219,749.14
3	SEX	17,368	0.78	100,670.93
4	AM	21,215	0.96	98,783.43
5	DO	35,108	1.58	87,646.09
6	I'M	21,070	0.95	75,674.23
7	ME	28,437	1.28	74,365.61
8	PENIS	8,658	0.39	62,311.52
9	WHAT	30,490	1.38	59,432.77
10	HAVE	39,284	1.77	47,771.84
11	PREGNANT	6,629	0.30	41,219.82
12	PLEASE	9,048	0.41	40,364.82
13	ANN	6,400	0.29	40,142.99
14	HELP	11,854	0.53	38,240.11
15	REALLY	12,211	0.55	35,827.87
16	BOYFRIEND	5,374	0.24	35,596.28
17	HI	5,075	0.23	32,154.75
18	HOW	14,569	0.66	30,287.97
19	GET	14,431	0.65	29,312.62
20	WORRIED	4,513	0.20	22,451.35











Topical Keyword Summary

Group	Types	Tokens	
Sex/Pregnancy/Relationships	180	67,582	
Sexual Body Parts	81	24,638	
Puberty	55	21,102	
Weight/Eating	55	15,759	
Smoking/Drugs/Alcohol	56	13,887	
Mental Health	29	5,117	



Euphemisms and Orthophemisms

- Dr-patient face to face encounters:
 Euphemisms used to refer to sexual body parts to save face
- Can hamper effectiveness of medical advice/lead to miscommunication (Stewart 2005; Weijts et al. 1993)
- Current emphasis on 'openess' in Drpatient communication in the NHS (Tayler & Ogden 2005)



	Freq	Per 100,000 words
Penis	8375	382
Willy	853	39
Knob	509	23
Dick	245	11
Cock	112	5
Vagina	2454	112
Fanny	580	26
Pussy	210	10
Minge	47	2
Down there	284	13
Down below	174	8
Downstairs	34	2
Privates	29	1



I have found an abnrmal lump on the side of my penis, it is especialy noticeable when it is erect. I have no idea what the lump is and it has really freaked my girlfriend out. It is making me feel insecure about myself and i dont know what to do. Please help.

Male 15 yrs. - 2004

I am 17, my penis is around 6 inches when erect and 4. 6 in circumference. Most sites say this is within average but it looks thin and I worry about being able to satisfy a partner. Is this normal or small?

Male 17 - 2009



dear dr ann im really worried abt my vagina! as it is a total mess down there, well i develop these big painful bumps just near the skin at the side of my vagina and after a week or so the melt away by themselves. i also develops these sort of bumps on my buttock also my pubic hair is very course and when i shave it it becomes very sore!! help!!

Female 13 yrs. - 2004

i have a small round brown spot on my vagina. is this something i need checking out or is it a normal spot ???

Not supplied - 2007



Online Disinhibition Effect

- Is the disinhibition effect the reason for the elevated levels of candour among the emailers
- Research Indicates that people disclose more intimately online that they do face to face
- Do young people communicate more explicitly than other generations?