

## Web Site Meets Teens on Their Own Turf

Sponsor: Morristown Memorial Hospital

Location: Morristown, NJ

Where do teens usually turn for answers to questions about sex, drugs, alcohol, depression or just growing up?

In 1998, the Morristown Memorial Hospital Advisory Board surveyed local households about how well health needs were being met. Adults were doing fine. Teenagers were another matter. Generally, the younger population didn't know where to go with their questions. When they did find an agency willing to help, they couldn't get to it because of inadequate transportation. Often, the information that was available was incorrect.

The board turned the results over to its Community Benefits Committee, which decided to meet the teenagers on their own turf—the Internet. The committee founded and funded a Web site called TeenHealthFX.com, which debuted last September. The site has logged more than 50,000 hits, most of them from the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area, but increasingly from all over the United States and even from overseas.

The questions are not surprising to anyone familiar with teens, say Cathy McCarthy and Lisa Picciuti, who organized and operate the site for Morristown Memorial Hospital. "No. 1 is, 'Am I normal?' " McCarthy says. "They want to know if their body parts are normal, if they're the right height or weight, do they measure up against somebody else. That's the bulk of them. The second category is nutrition and health."

Teenagers can post questions anonymously anytime and have them answered later or enter a chat room and receive answers immediately. Links to other Web sites offering health information are provided, along with a general section of helpful tips from a teen advisory panel. McCarthy and Picciuti assign the questions to hospital staff members and prepare the answers, which are approved by a medical panel. "Anyone can post a Web site," Picciuti says. "What's different about ours is that we have experts returning information." They monitor the site to protect against pedophiles sending messages and to ensure that all conversations are appropriate.

McCarthy says there's enough money to keep the site going for another two years. Meanwhile, she and Picciuti plan to develop a similar site for parents of adolescents. "Just imagine all the questions your parents had about you when you were a teenager," she says.

**The Problem:** Teenagers in community had nowhere to go for answers to personal questions.

**The Players:** Atlantic Health System, including Morristown Memorial Hospital, doctors and staff.

**The Plan:** Build a Web site where teens can go to have their questions answered and get regular advice on topics affecting their health and lifestyle.

**The Results:** Some 50,000 individuals, mostly teens, have visited the site and are having their questions monitored and answered by experts. Similar Website for parents is planned.

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