Improving older adults' e-health literacy in public libraries: the Older Adult Team (OAT) project

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Supported by a 3-year Faculty Early Career Award from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a team of faculty and graduate students in the College of Information Studies at the University of Maryland have been working with a team of older adults (the Older Adult Team or OAT) weekly in a public library in Maryland since September 2009. The aim of this research project is to advance scientific knowledge about older adult learning theory particularly in the areas of health literacy and computer literacy – that is, e-health literacy, or the ability to obtain, process, and use electronic health information. Our specific approach is to collaboratively develop and evaluate senior-oriented, low-cost public-library-based training programs in accessing reliable health information on the Internet, and with older adults serving as volunteer instructors to help improve their age peers' e-health literacy. This approach creates ample opportunities for older adults to be involved in the process and thus enables full incorporation of the expertise of older adults. We report here what we have learned in the first year of this project and what we plan to do next, including the sustainability of the mechanism developed in this project. Implications for lifelong learning, civic engagement and volunteering in later life, and older adults' e-health literacy will also be discussed.