Understanding the Information Behavior-Health Behavior Link
Tiffany Veinot, University of Michigan (tveinot@umich.edu)

Project Description:
Rationale. Health research shows that knowing about health risks may not translate into behavior change to reduce those risks. However, such research typically operationalizes health information acquisition with knowledge tests. At the same time, researchers have reported a knowledge–behavior gap, finding that knowledge on its own is not sufficient for stimulating health behavior change. However, the majority of research in this area has measured the effects of one-way mass communication campaigns or health education sessions and has failed to account for information behaviors that may take place outside of planned interventions, such as information seeking, incidental information acquisition, and information use.

Academic Objectives. This project focuses on answering the questions, “What, if any, are the role of information acquisition, sharing and use in the development and maintenance of health behaviors?” To answer this question, this project will draw from data collected as part of a two projects focused on people living with chronic diseases, including diabetes, hypertension, kidney disease and HIV/AIDS. The data set includes qualitative interviews and surveys conducted with 111 chronic disease patients, and 58 caregivers of people with chronic diseases.

Since data are already collected, this project will focus specifically on data analysis and interpretation, synthesis of existing literature, and scholarly writing. A goal of the project will be to contribute to theoretical insights regarding the information behavior-health behavior link; accordingly, there will be an emphasis on qualitative analysis of interview transcripts and survey data according to existing information behavior theories, and on conducting analyses that facilitate the generation of new concepts and theories. These theoretical contributions will provide a basis for the future design of information technologies and services to better support people with chronic diseases who want to change their behavior and improve their health.

Student Participation:
The student trainee will serve as a research assistant for the project. In this role, I will mentor him/her in the entire process of scholarly writing, from literature review to data analysis to writing and revision. Accordingly, he or she will: 1) synthesize literature in an area of research; 2) categorize and code interview data using a mixture of analytical approaches; 3) conduct statistical analyses of survey data; 4) prepare a manuscript that addresses the research questions; and 5) gain experience with the processes of paper submission, revision, and publication.

Contribution to Student Academic and Professional Development. The student will gain experience with organizing, analyzing, and presenting multiple types of data. He or she will gain skill in discerning the quantity and type of qualitative data that is required to produce a publishable journal article in the field of health information science. He or she will have the opportunity to learn how to position research questions in the context of published literature, how to describe and report research methods, how to report results, and how to reflect upon the implications of reported research. He or she will also learn how to prepare and submit manuscripts, and how to manage manuscript revision processes as required.
Mentoring Plan:
I will meet with the student on a weekly basis throughout the project. Additionally, we will work together more closely as we begin each new phase of the study. I will provide instruction in data analysis methods, and I will provide feedback on coding, memos and other results of analysis. I will also instruct the student in writing for a scholarly audience, and provide detailed feedback on manuscript drafts first prepared by the student.