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## E-health: On-site treatment

Internet effective in  
informing patients

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The 24 children in the University of Virginia study couldn't control their bowels. They defecated in their pants an average of seven times a week.

By the end of the month-long study, 12 of the children were averaging one accident every two weeks. The other half reported no improvement.

The difference between the two groups? The Internet.

"The study shows that the Internet can provide effective treatment," said Lee Ritterband, a UVA assistant professor with the Center for Behavioral Medicine Research and the lead author of the study.

All 24 children in the study continued to see their physician for treatment. But the 12 children who learned to control their bowels regularly logged on to ucan-pooptoo.com, an e-health Web site created by Ritterband and his colleagues.

"It's not a book online," Ritterband explained. "It's personalized so that users can receive information pertinent to their situation. Because it's Web-based, all the high-tech, cutting-edge, eye-candy type of components can be used, including graphics, animations,

## Health

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Wood Johnson Foundation is funding such studies.

"The evidence is emerging," said David Ahern, the national program director of the Health e-Technologies Initiative.

"Early studies show that there is a positive impact."

Ahern says the benefits of e-health sites may include better patient outcomes and reduced doctors visits.

"The goal is not to replace provider care," Ahern said. "But in some cases they can serve to be a viable substitute for routine visits."

Ritterband said that e-health sites also help people who are too embarrassed to talk