Biomedical and Health Informatics Lecture Series

Tuesday, April 28, 2009
12:00 - 12:50 p.m., Room T-498

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"Managing Health Information in Your Life: Catalyzing Social Support"

Managing Health Information in Your Life is a 3-year, NLM-funded project to understand the work that cancer patients do in managing their health information and to develop new technology that supports that work in the context of patients' daily lives. In this talk, I will give an overview of our project, but detail one aspect of our work centering on social support for cancer patients. Others have articulated the critical need for social support in the physical and mental health of patients, but few have studied what the barriers are to this social support or how technology can be utilized to reduce those barriers. In this project, we uncovered a host of barriers to social support, ranging from uncertainty about what help to ask for from the patient's perspective to fear of being too intrusive from the social network's perspective. We also developed a prototype, utilizing Facebook that includes explicit features to reduce these barriers and thus, promote the healthy outcomes associated with strong social support.

Wanda Pratt is an Associate Professor in both the Information School and the Division of Biomedical & Health Informatics in the Medical School at the University of Washington. She received her Ph.D. in Medical Informatics from Stanford University, her M.S. in Computer Science from the University of Texas, and her B.S. in Electrical and Computer Engineering from the University of Kansas. Her published papers span a wide range of topics whose central theme is to understand the problem of information overload in a variety of health contexts and to develop new types technology to address those problems. She received an NSF CAREER Award for her work on literature-based discovery systems, is on the editorial board for the Journal of Biomedical Informatics, and recently served on the standing grant-review committee for the National Library of Medicine.