Background

Texas WIC clinics offer a variety of ways for WIC participants to receive nutrition education as part of WIC services. WIC participants receive nutrition education via group classes at local WIC agencies, through internet-based online courses, and by self-paced paper and pencil lessons. To improve operations and services, some WIC clinics nationwide are incorporating technology. Therefore, the Texas WIC Kiosk Project was designed to explore the use of touch-screen, interactive computer terminals (kiosks) as an alternative means of delivering nutrition education lessons and benefit card usage training at clinics. To allow participants to check their benefits balance and identify WIC approved products while at the grocery store, a store kiosk was placed. This study examined the approach, completion, and utilization rates of these kiosks.

What were the research questions?

The Texas WIC Kiosk Evaluation Project included assessment of five major activities:

- A literature review on kiosks used for nutrition education
- Development of two kiosk lessons
- Assessment of kiosk usage by WIC participants
- Identification, selection, installation and monitoring of kiosk performance
- Assessment of kiosk use-satisfaction, among users and key stakeholders including WIC participants, WIC clinic staff, state WIC staff, and the retailer

What did we learn?

From the literature, we learned that:

- 12 states currently use kiosk-based nutrition education lessons for their WIC clients
- Kiosk lessons are offered in both English & Spanish interactive programs
- 26 states use technology for the printing of their federal WIC program vouchers
- Each state, has significant autonomy in how it operates its respective WIC programs

Kiosk placement:

- The placement of the kiosk is critical
- Kiosks placed in highly visible areas had increased utilization by WIC participants but also increased access by children
- Child proof gates and private nooks reduced kiosk access by children
- The availability of space & access to the internet in WIC clinics will greatly influence the kiosk location and use

Researchers:

Dr. Peter S. Murano, Principal Investigator
Dr. E. Lisako J. McKyer, Co-Principal Investigator
Dr. Pam Doughty
  Director
  Program Evaluation
Asha Girimaji, Project Coordinator

Student Support:
Nicole Baker
Cassie Diep
Kelly Vaughan

Texas A&M University

Acknowledgements:
Texas Department of State Health Services

Institute for OBESITY Research and Program Evaluation
Kiosk placement (con’t):
- Usage patterns varied between the store kiosks and those used in clinics. While the pilot program treated all kiosks as the same, the outcomes indicated two “different” kiosk programs in effect:
  A) clinic-kiosk for nutrition education & training
  B) store-kiosk for facilitating the WIC participant’s shopping experiences

Clinic kiosk use:
- Eighty percent of WIC participants preferred multi-media delivery formats for nutrition education lessons
- WIC were preferred over on-line lesson formats by nearly five times
- WIC participants and staff found kiosk format to be very user friendly
- On screen instructions reduced staff time needed for lesson explanation
- Touch screen feature made kiosk use easy, eliminating need for a keyboard and mouse

Figure 1. Preferred Mode for WIC Nutrition Lessons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preferred Mode for WIC Nutrition Lessons</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper, self-paced lessons</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiosk lessons, like today</td>
<td>1,164</td>
<td>65.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online internet lessons</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom lessons at the WIC Office</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1,769</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grocery store kiosk use:
- WIC participants scanned products to identify them as WIC eligible
- WIC participants checked their balances prior to check out reducing wait times and expediting service at the check-out counter
- Grocery store space for kiosk placement was not identified as a problem

Areas of concern relating to kiosk use:
- Availability of a dedicated space within the clinic
- Elimination of interference from competing activities
- Providing privacy/anonymity to the WIC participants as they check their shopping balance and check for WIC eligible products at the store might be an issue
- Provision of maintenance plans to ensure proper operation
- Sufficient technical support

Summary & Conclusions
From this evaluation project it was learned that store kiosks and clinic kiosks had different usage patterns, and hence have differing needs to address. Clinics need to develop criteria for ideal kiosk space, with an elimination of interference from competing activities. Software chosen for use within the kiosks needs to merge with the on-line lessons currently offered by WIC and additional consideration must be focused on the cost effectiveness of a rollout, maintenance of the kiosk system and maintaining updates. Grocery stores need to enhance visibility of their kiosks while still providing privacy/anonymity to WIC participants. Both sites need technical support and maintenance plans for service when needed. Therefore, subsequent implementation of kiosks should include an evaluation component to address these issues.

What does this mean for Texas? The incorporation of kiosks for the provision of nutrition education lessons would both expand nutrition education opportunities beyond the walls of the classroom and enable programming to be current with the use of technology. Acquired knowledge along with the means to monitor their benefits balance through store kiosks will empower the WIC participants to make healthy choices when purchasing food, to select WIC eligible foods and to budget their benefits use throughout the month, rather than relying on the store clerks to notify them of product ineligibility and/or balance exhaustion. An empowered WIC participant is a WIC success.