

Telephone trumps social media when communicating with teens about research

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Teens involved in research studies prefer to be contacted about their participation by telephone as opposed to social media or electronic communication, according to Georgia Health Sciences University researchers. Pictured are (L to R) Dr. Martha Tingen, Charles W. Linder Endowed Chair in Pediatrics, and Dr. Dennis Ownby, Chief of the Section of Allergy-Immunology and Rheumatology, who polled participants in their Puff City research study. Credit: Phil Jones, Georgia Health Sciences University campus photographer

If you think teenagers prefer social media over the telephone, you may want to think again, at least when it comes to teens involved in research studies.

When 188 ninth-11th graders in four rural Georgia counties were asked how they preferred to be contacted about their participation in a Georgia Health Sciences University research study:

- Nearly 54 percent preferred contact via cell and/or land line with a recorded message from a research assistant they know using a voice messaging call system
- Nearly 24 percent preferred a personal call from the research assistant
- 15 percent preferred text messaging
- Nearly 8 percent preferred [Facebook](#).

While the results from the teenage study subjects were a little "shocking" to the researchers, it is good information to have, said Dr. Martha S. Tingen, who holds the Charles W. Linder Endowed Chair in Pediatrics at GHSU. "In our high-tech world, what I am learning is people still like the personal touch." She notes that the fact that the phone messages, while delivered en masse, were recorded by young research assistants the [study participants](#) work with and like, which probably gave more traditional communication an edge.

Tingen is presenting the findings during the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Conference on [Health Communication](#), Marketing and Media, Aug. 9-11 in Atlanta.

"Teenagers have been left out of a lot of studies because they are perceived as being difficult to work with and difficult to get to come in," said Dr. Dennis Ownby, Chief of the GHSU Section of Allergy-Immunology and Rheumatology. However GHSU researchers have experienced a near 99 percent compliance and retention rate in the Puff City Program, a National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute study designed to help [teens](#) in rural areas better manage asthma.

The fact that the majority of teens preferred a voice messaging call system made contacts more efficient and effective for the researchers and teens alike. Teens did not have to respond, like they would/should to a text message or log onto a website and the interaction was free. Still researchers could verify the message was received and a single recorded message that can be sent to unlimited receivers was another saving grace, Tingen said. "From a labor-intensive standpoint it's fantastic," she said. "This has worked so well for us, we hope it will help the scientific community in future studies with teens."

Provided by Georgia Health Sciences University

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