As healthcare providers and payers increasingly look to Web-based and other electronic solutions, healthcare consumers, too, are using online platforms to handle more of their medical needs, although, there is considerable room for growth. Age certainly is a factor in online utilization, according to data from the Thomson Reuters 2010 PULSE™ Healthcare Survey, which shows that those under age 64 are more open to electronic interaction.

INTERNET ACCESS BY AGE
Most Americans (77.6%) have access to the Internet, although the 65-and-older group lags somewhat, as just over half (52.7%) have access. As might be expected, the under-35- and the 35- to 64-year-olds are more connected, with both groups exceeding 80%. But access alone does not translate into use for healthcare purposes, as the other charts in this report will demonstrate.

OBTAINING PHYSICIAN INFORMATION
Less than one-tenth (8.8%) of Americans use the Internet to research physician information. Even among the younger age groups, that figure has yet to yet to pass the 11% mark, and just 3.2% of seniors do such online research.

OBTAINING LAB OR TEST RESULTS
When it comes to getting test and lab results, just 6% of the population uses the Web. And while younger age groups are roughly twice as likely as seniors to do so, there is room for growth.
BEING ABLE TO COMMUNICATE WITH PROVIDER ONLINE

Even among the plugged-in younger demographic, only 10% say that it is very important or important to be able to communicate with their healthcare provider online.

Actually Communicating with Provider Online

Fewer than one in five Americans has actually engaged in online communication with a provider, but even about 8% of the 65-and-older group has done so.

MAKING APPOINTMENTS

In addition to using the Internet as a research or communication tool, about 8% of Americans are going online to schedule healthcare appointments.

PAYING BILLS

Seniors are less likely to pay medical bills online, with not even 4% using that method; about 10% of those in other age demographics take advantage of electronic bill-paying.

VISITING LOCAL HOSPITAL WEBSITE

Nearly a quarter of the under-35 demographic has visited a local hospital’s website, and the share drops in noticeable intervals for the 35-to-64 and the 65-and-older age groups.

Visiting Physician Website

A similar trend is seen for visiting local physician websites, with just over 20% of the under-35 group doing so, but just about 17% and 6% for the 35-to-64 and the 65-and-older age groups, respectively.

CALLING FOR A PHYSICIAN REFERRAL

In this age of the Internet, where does the call center fit in? Roughly one-quarter (24.1%) of Americans indicate they would be likely or very likely to call for a physician referral. There is not significant variation by age group, though the seniors are least likely to place a call.

Calling to Register for a Program

Fewer than one in five Americans would be likely or very likely to call a healthcare provider to register for a health-related program. And as with calls for physician referrals, there is little variation based on age group, and nearly half of each group is very unlikely to call to register.