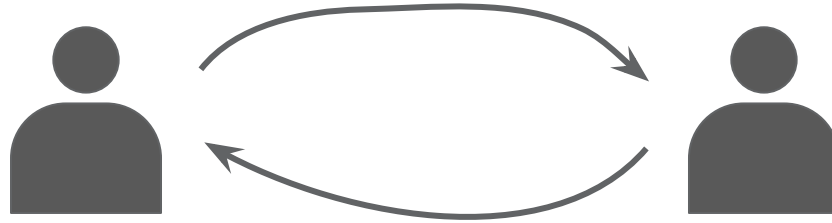


# Peer Recommendation Interventions for Health-related Social Support ( a feasibility assessment)

October 10, 2025

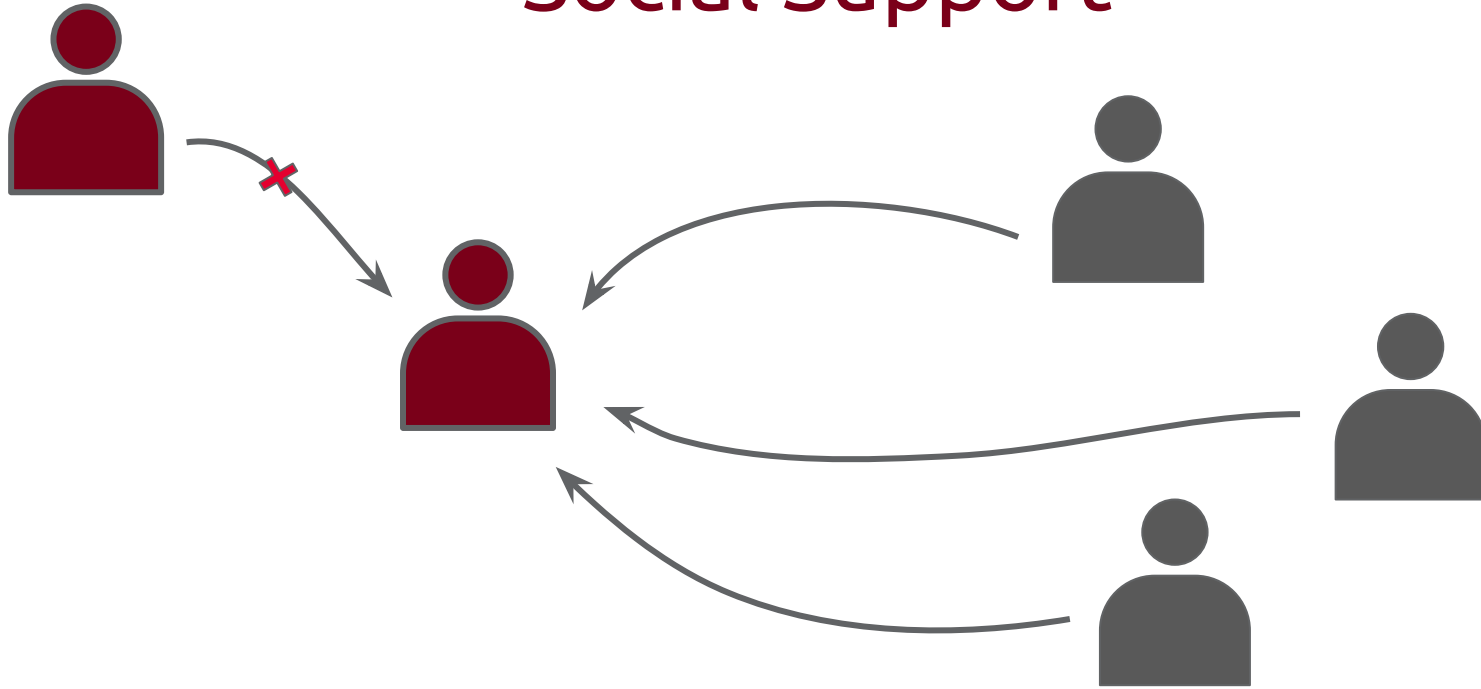
**Zachary Levonian**, Matthew Zent, Ngan Nguyen,  
Matthew McNamara, Loren Terveen, Svetlana Yarosh

# Social Support



Useful during health journeys

# Social Support



# Social Support

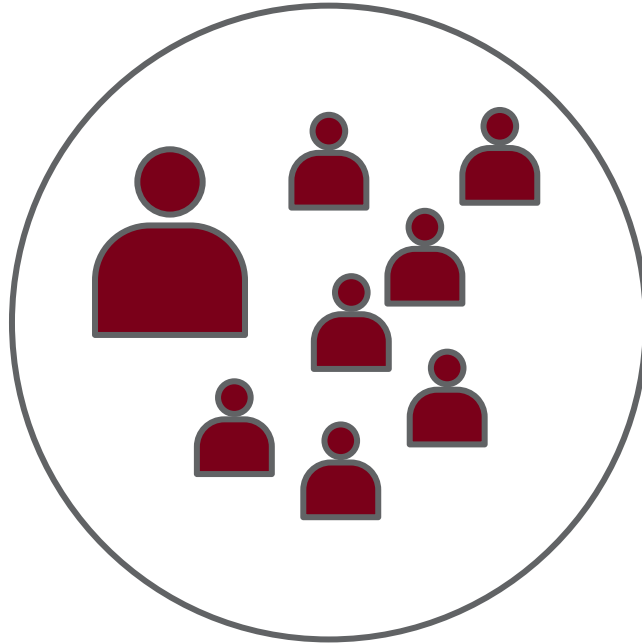


# Social Support



yay, the internet

# Social Support



**Online Health Community**

Purpose: Make support available

Recommendation  
can **increase**:

Reading about peer experiences

Interacting with peers

*Behaviors* are associated with *benefits*

## Recommendation can **increase**:

With interactions from  
**visitors** only:

2  
blog  
posts  
(median)

1 month  
before final  
post  
(median)

---

With interactions from  
at least one **peer**:

8  
blog  
posts  
(median)

4 months  
before final  
post  
(median)

+6 blog posts

+3 months

Interacting with peers

\*Based on 200,000 CaringBridge blogs with at least one interaction.

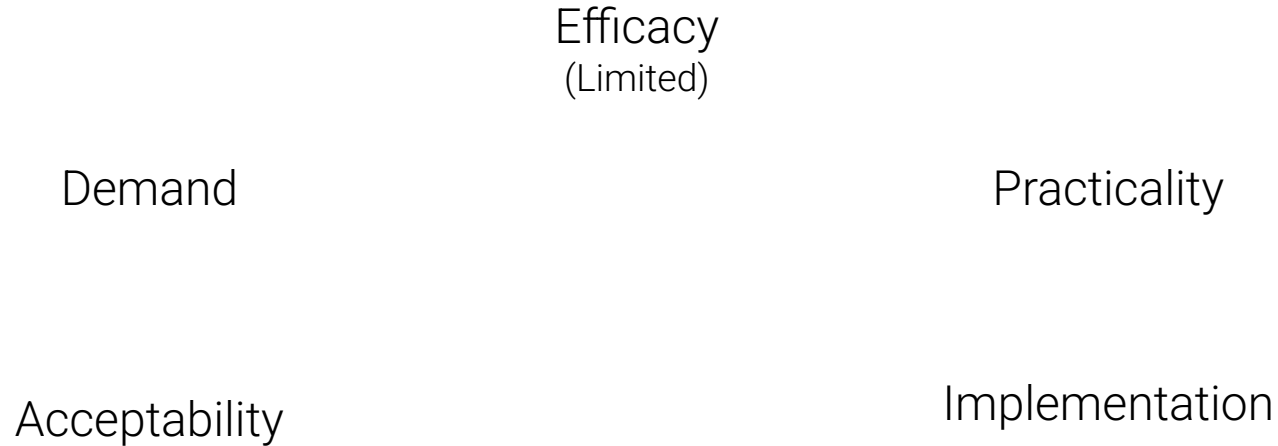


# Randomized-controlled trial (RCT)?

Efficacy!

Will the recommendation intervention  
actually increase desired behaviors?

# Feasibility study



Deborah J. Bowen, Matthew Kreuter, Bonnie Spring, Ludmila Cofta-Woerpel, Laura Linnan, Diane Weiner, Suzanne Bakken, Cecilia Patrick Kaplan, Linda Squiers, Cecilia Fabrizio, and Maria Fernandez. 2009. How We Design Feasibility Studies. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 36, 5 (May 2009), 452–457.

Email notifications  
are common on  
CaringBridge

## Blog recommendation email

### UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Hi Ellen,

There's a lot of love happening on CaringBridge. Here are some active sites you might be interested in:

- [John and Suzie's Blog](#) Recent [journal](#) update: **"November 18, 2021** Hello everyone, John continues to do well and is improving daily. He can move again! We visi..." [Read more.](#)

3 additional blog suggestions omitted for space

- [Lori Wilson](#) Recent [journal](#) update: **"Victory!** 175 character update ..." [Read more.](#)

[Give us feedback on these recommendations.](#) Other thoughts or questions? Just respond to this email.

*Personal note or study timeline updates go here.*


[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

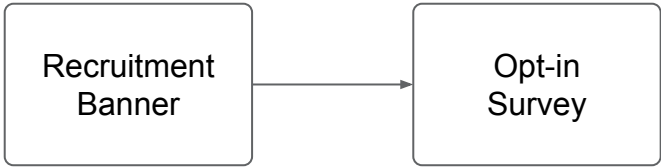
[I don't want to receive these emails anymore](#)

[Your CaringBridge Home](#)

[CaringBridge Help Center](#)

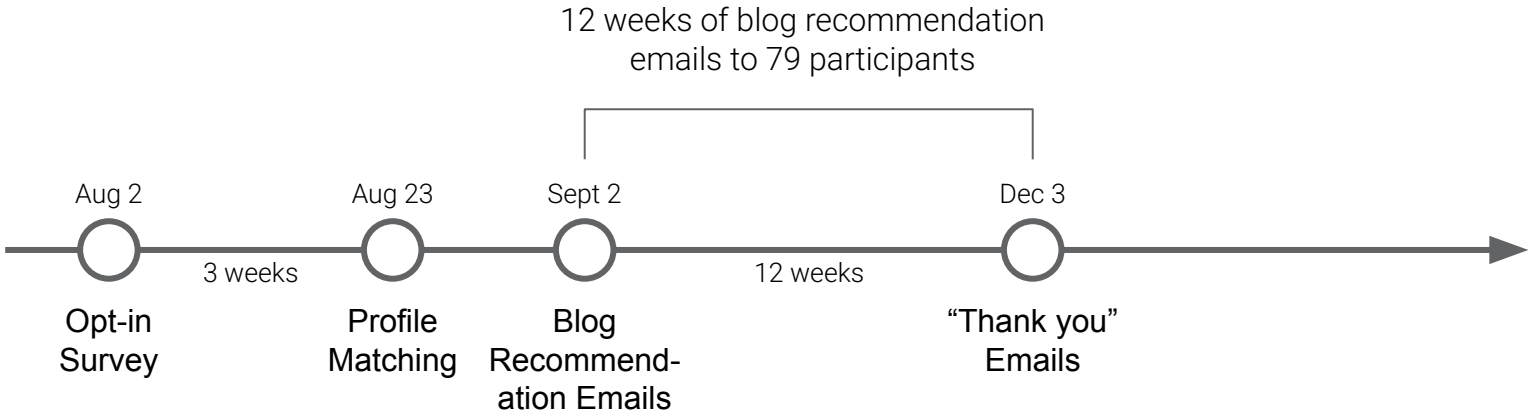
# Field study: Recommending CaringBridge blogs to authors

CaringBridge authors are invited to join a research study on supporting fellow authors.   
[Opt in to receive suggestions for sites to follow.](#)

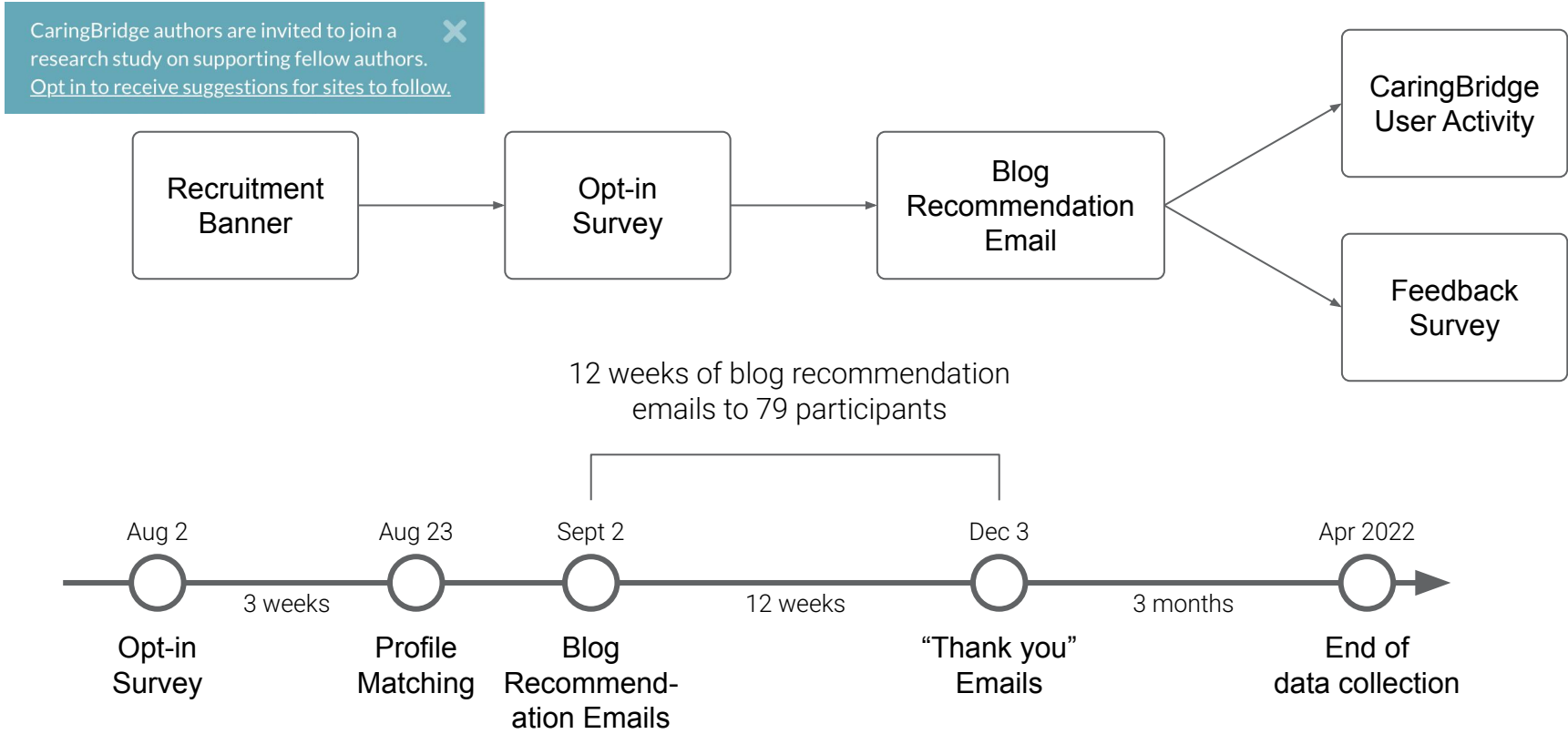


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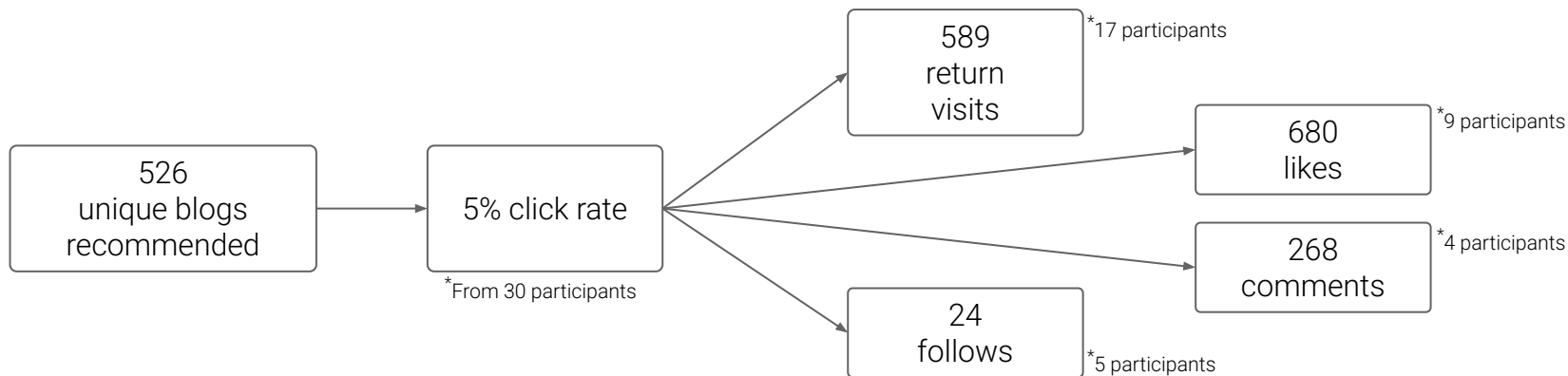
# Field study: Recommending CaringBridge blogs to authors



## Demand & Efficacy

- No evidence of negative impact on retention or engagement
- 2 “bad” recommendations

“Even with all I’m going through I’ve come to care about these people whose blogs I am following. .... So I’m really really grateful you guys have done this.”



# Peer Recommendation Interventions for Health-related Social Support: a Feasibility Assessment

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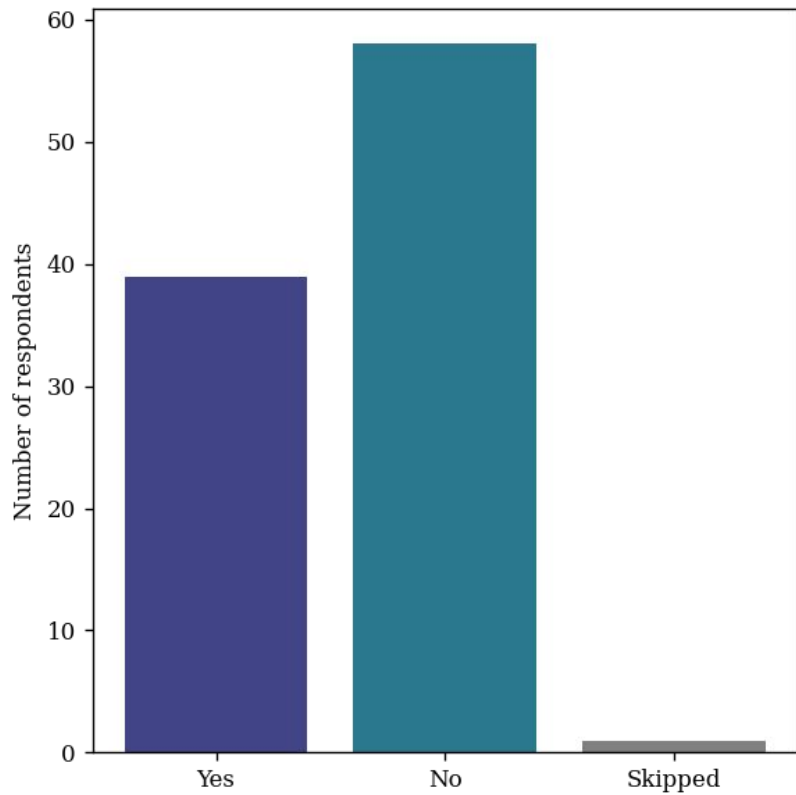
- » ACM DL: [dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3711044](https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3711044)
- » Paper: [arxiv.org/abs/2209.04973](https://arxiv.org/abs/2209.04973)
- » Code: [github.com/levon003/HealthBlogRec](https://github.com/levon003/HealthBlogRec)
- » More: [levon003.github.io](https://levon003.github.io)



## Field study: Survey

- » Have you ever visited the CaringBridge site of an author who you did not know personally?

**40%** of respondents  
say they've visited a stranger's site



## Field study: Survey

Motivations	% checked	Peer characteristics	% checked
Learn from others	80%	Similar diagnosis or symptoms	84%
Communicate with peers	46%	Similar treatment	54%
Receive experienced support	44%	High-quality writing	51%
Mentor newer authors	29%	Same caregiver relationship	32%
Not interested, but maybe in future	6%	Lives near me	25%
Never interested	2%	Similar cultural background	14%
Not interested, but maybe in past	0%		
Something else	9%	Something else	8 (8.5%)

**40%** of respondents  
say they've visited a stranger's site

## Future Work

...other than running an RCT with self-report support outcomes

Audience and  
self-disclosure choices

Recommendation for  
social transition

Who reaps the  
support benefits?

# Acceptability: Explicit feedback

## The Good

Diverse  
Experiences

Common  
Ground

“helpful and informative”

## The Bad

Boring  
Writing

Overly  
Religious

“Where’s the Jesus filter”

## The Ugly

Death

Intrusive  
(6 unsubscriptions)

“Don’t want to read about  
people dying of cancer”

“Hard to look at what other  
people are going through”

## Acceptability: Interaction

Opportunities for facilitating interaction

First-contact  
strategies

Potential  
norm  
violations

Reciprocation

# Generalizability

## Affordances of social connection tech

Visibility

No user profiles,  
privacy centric,  
no “community  
norms”

Availability

Asynchronous,  
instant or daily  
notifications

Control

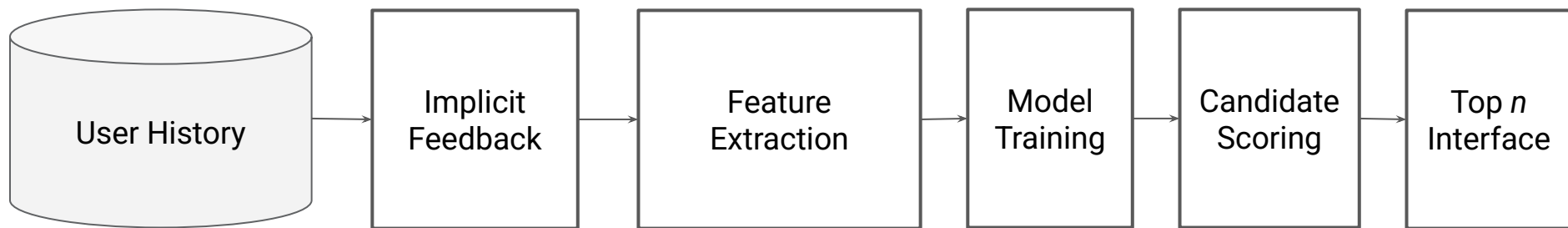
Text-based,  
site-centric

Reach

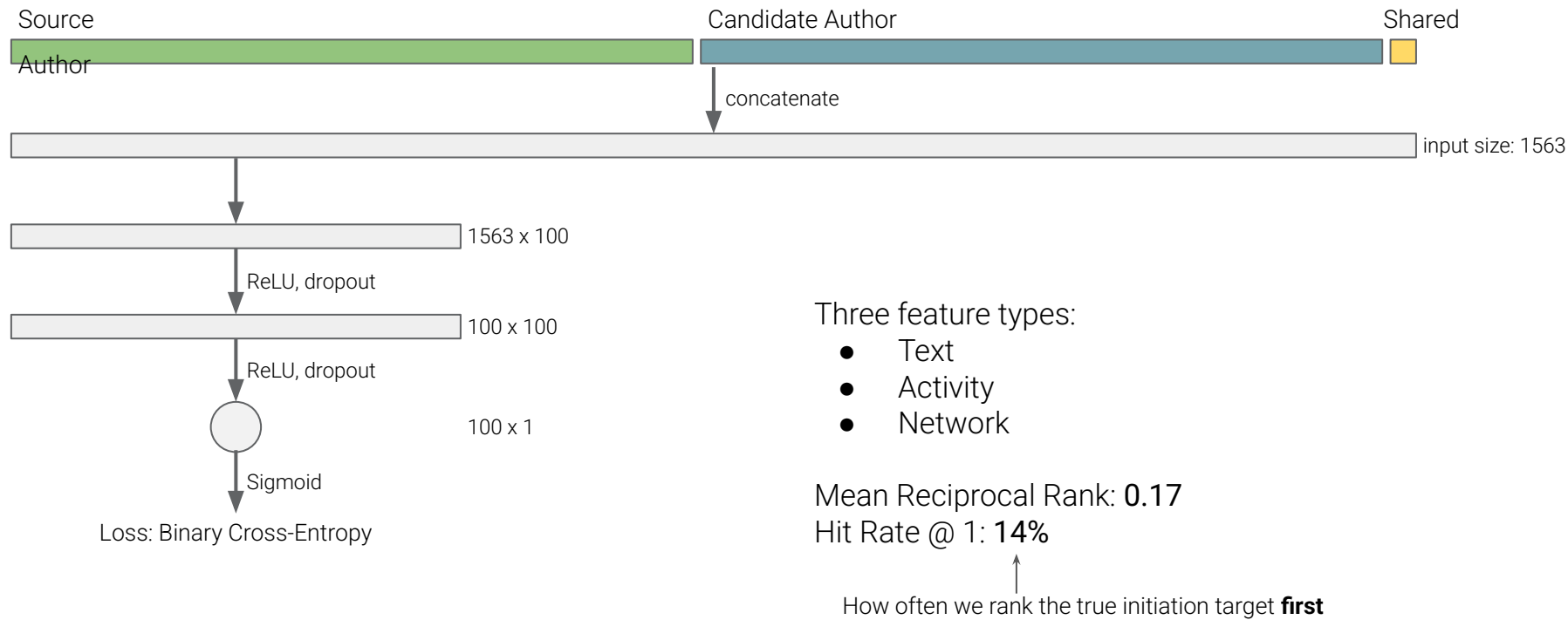
No content search,  
no content labels,  
no direct messaging

Stephen A. Rains. 2018. *Coping with Illness Digitally*.

# Implementation



# Pointwise Recommendation Model





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