Survey: Use of the Internet in the Patient Doctor relationship

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The mission of Heath On the Net Foundation

Since 1995, HON has been tackling the major obstacles of Internet usage: the overwhelming quantity of information and the uneven quality of health information available online by developing a de facto standard, the Code of conduct (HONcode) and services to assure the quality and access of trustworthy and relevant sources of online health and medical information.
# The HONcode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Requirement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authoritativeness</td>
<td>Indicate the qualifications of the authors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complementarity</td>
<td>Information should support, not replace, doctor-patient relationship; Mission and Audience of site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy</td>
<td>Respect the privacy and confidentiality of personal data submitted to the site by the visitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution</td>
<td>Cite the source(s) of published information and dating of medical and health pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justifiability</td>
<td>Site must back up claims relating to benefits and performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>Accessible presentation, identities of editor and Webmaster, accurate email contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial disclosure</td>
<td>Identify funding sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsorship</td>
<td>Clearly distinguish advertising from editorial content</td>
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- 7'000 HONcode certified sites
- 102 countries & 35 languages
- +400 in Switzerland
- +1’000 in France - Collaboration at the governmental level with French Health Authority (Haute Autorité de Santé - HAS)
The Context

- The number of Internet users has increased, many people who visit Health websites on the Internet do so as a potential patient, hence the concept of "e-patient" [1-3].

- Cyberchondria (increased anxiety after consulting the Internet for health information) highlights the potential impact of Internet on e-patient [4].

- The possibilities offered by information and the Internet are changing the behavior of e-patients and their relationship with their doctors [5].

1. Office fédéral de la statistique
2. The Social Life of Health Information, June 2009, pewinternet.org
3. Haute Autorité de Santé
4. Cyberchondria: Studies of the Escalation of Medical Concerns in Web Search
5. E-patients With a Disability or Chronic Disease, Oct. 2007, Pew internet & American Life project
Importance of the Online Health and Medical Information

- 1,4 billion users worldwide connected in 2008 [1]
- In 2008, 68% of the Swiss population use Internet (+ 18 % in 5 years) [2]
- Patients with chronic diseases are more likely to use internet before making treatment decisions [3]
- 58% say the information they found in their last search affected a decision on how to treat an illness or condition [4]
- BUT .... only 15% of health information seekers say they “always” check the source and date

1 http://www.internetworldstats.com/
2 Office fédéral de la statistique
3 The Social Life of Health Information, June 2009, pewinternet.org
4 E-patients With a Disability or Chronic Disease, Oct. 2007, Pew internet & American Life project
Our motivation

- Offer physicians the tools to address the search for health information on the Internet with their patients by guiding them to trustworthy online health information.

- To do this, we conducted an investigation of doctors in Geneva for their habits and needs.
The Survey

The survey consists of 5 questions:

- Do you have Internet access in your practice?
- Do you happen to recommend websites to your patients?
- Would you use an Internet tool that allows you to select sites for quality and trust classified by subjects to advise your patients?
- What types of sites would you advise? (choose from a list)
- Do you use already printed "cards" containing the addresses of sites specific to certain diseases?
The Method

- The survey was distributed electronically (email) in addition to snail mail where physicians had not submitted their email addresses to the AMG (Association des Médecins de Genève).

- This method identified two groups, those who responded electronically and those who responded by mail.
Results

Of the 1,751 doctors surveyed, 207 responded electronically and 61 responded by mail.

Do you have Internet access in your practice? Do you recommend websites to your patients?

1 - Avez-vous un accès Internet à votre cabinet ?

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<th></th>
<th>Oui</th>
<th>Non</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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2 - Vous arrive-t-il de recommander des sites Internet à vos patients?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Oui</th>
<th>Non</th>
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<td></td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>54%</td>
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Would you use an Internet tool that allows you to select sites for quality and trust classified by subjects to advise your patients?

Group who responded by snail mail

Group who responded by email
Results - continued

Would you use already printed "cards" containing the addresses of sites specific to certain diseases?

Group who responded by snail mail

5. Utilisez-vous des « fiches » déjà imprimées contenant des adresses de sites sélectionnés spécifiques à certaines maladies

Group who responded by email

5. Utilisez-vous des « fiches » déjà imprimées contenant des adresses de sites sélectionnés spécifiques à certaines maladies
Conclusions and Perspectives

The more familiar with the Internet a doctor is, the more likely he/she is to recommend websites to his/her patients.

Sites that most doctors recommend to their patients are:
- sites of specialized medical information (59%)
- sites of general medical information (50%)
- sites of associations of patients (50%)
- sites providing ‘advice for everyday life’ (46%)

Doctors recommend sites that inform, support and guide their patients.

The doctors are receptive to the idea of "prescribing" Internet sites and health information that would contribute positively to education and support for their patients.