

Careum Congress 2014

17./18.03.2014, Basel

«Machtfaktor Patient 3.0» – Patienten verändern das Gesicht des Gesundheitswesens

"The power of patients 3.0" – Patients are changing the face of health care

CAR14-123

Is internet health information an answer to the doctor's aesculapian power?

Eeckman, Edgard* (1)

(1) *Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Free University of Brussels), Brussels, Belgium*

Teaser: Specialized knowledge is a power source in the doctor-patient relationship. In our digital society patients have potentially easier access to medical knowledge. Is the knowledge gap between patient and doctor thereby narrowing?

Background, objective: The research studies the possible link between the internet as a social source of health information and its influence in empowering the patient in his relationship with his general practitioner. A mixed research approach has been developed of which the first phase is a quantitative one: an internet survey towards healthy people and patients. The survey has been launched in October 2012 and was closed on 30 August 2013. 3071 respondents participated. Although the survey has been done serving as a starting point for the qualitative part of the research, the research makes a first analysis of the question: is knowledge a source of power in the patient-doctor relationship and is the internet as a social source of health information neutralizing the aesculapian power (Brody, 1992) the doctor possesses?

Approach, methods, patient engagement: The answers on the survey allow first thoughts on knowledge as a source of power and the possibility of the internet as a social source of health information to neutralize the aesculapian power (Brody, 1992) of the doctor.

Findings: Knowledge is a recognized source of power, but not every doctor possesses aesculapian power in any circumstances. Not only is aesculapian power not absolute, the notion of knowledge isn't either. The internet as a potential source of health information may help some patients to decrease the aesculapian power of the doctor. It may; we note different conditions. We distinguish two categories of conditions or obstacles: those linked to the internet as a health information source and those connected to the health information seeker.

A large majority of our respondents (91,24%) recognize general practitioners having medical knowledge they don't possess. Part of those who don't, are chronically ill patients, which is an indication of these patients being experts in their own right. Those who don't, also have specific characteristics indicating a lack of trust in their general practitioners. The internet as a source of health information is not considered to be a totally trustful information source by the respondents.

Discussion and implications: Any technology should not be considered isolated from the social and cultural processes in which it has been created, exists and is used. Several conditions have to be fulfilled and obstacles have to be taken for the internet to serve as a health information source capable of serving as counterweight against the aesculapian power of the doctor. There is no base for technological determinism or internet centrism.

Key terms: knowledge power internet health information general practitioner doctor patient