

Chmelf

Does Internet Health Information Offset the Doctor's Aesculapian Power ?

Edgard Eeckman

Who am I?

- Edgard Eeckman
- Communication Manager UZ Brussel
- Scientific researcher
Free University of Brussels
(Vrije Universiteit Brussel)
- PhD student communication sciences
(started end 2009)

Basic Research Question

What is the influence of the internet as a source of health information on the power balance between patient and doctor ?

Doctor = General Practitioner/GP



Basic Research Question

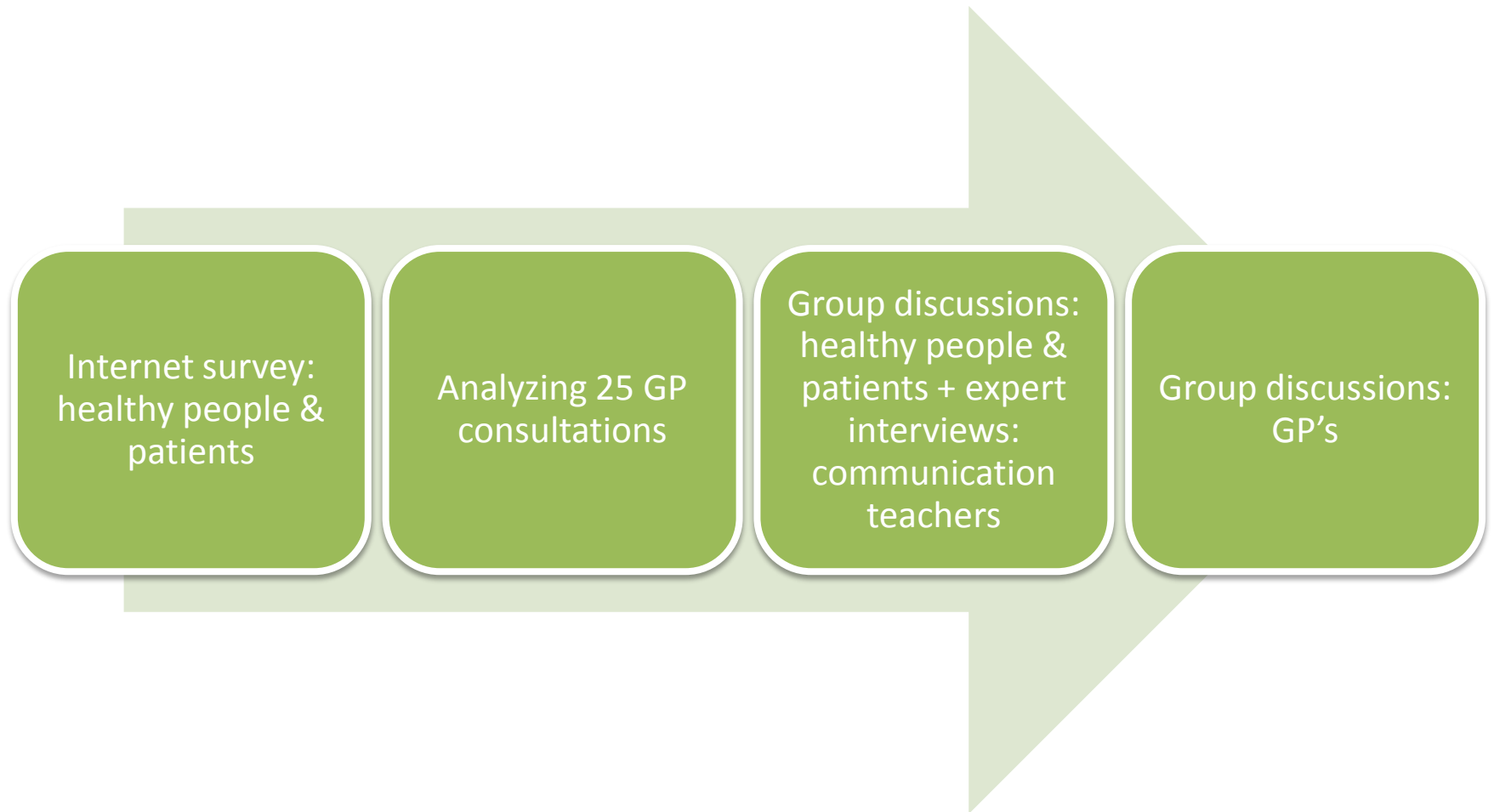
**What is the influence of the internet
as a source of health information
on the power balance
between patient and doctor ?**



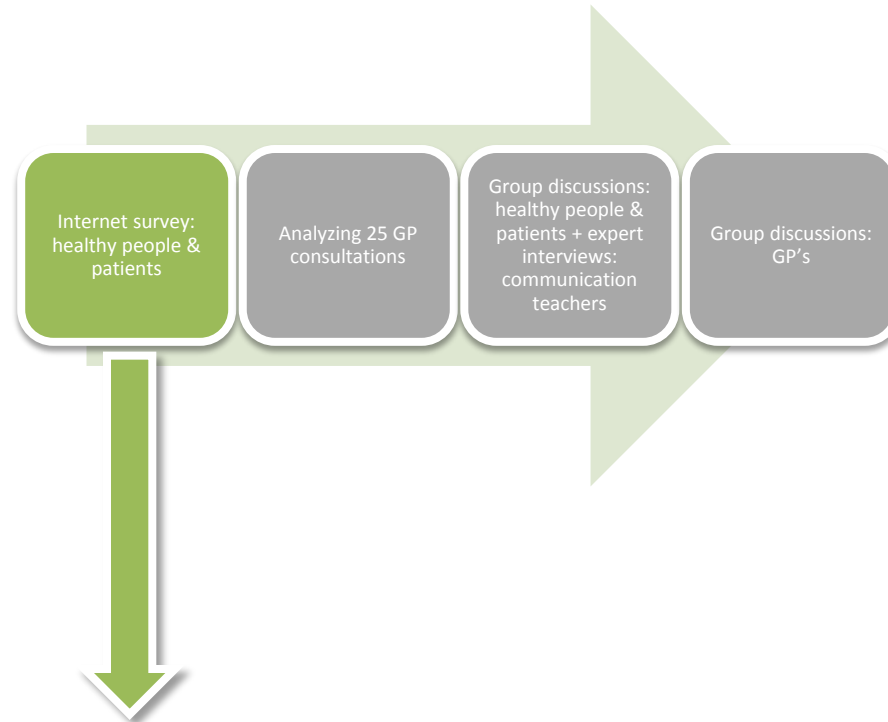
Relevance

1. It is important to understand all aspects of the power balance when we want to understand how we can achieve **patient empowerment**.
2. **Health knowledge** is the basis to enable and empower individuals and organizations to take better health care decisions (Al-Shorbaji, 2012).
3. **Information gap** between patients and their doctors is narrowing (Webb, 2003)
4. **Internet health information** is threatening the medical expert system (Kuppersmith, 2002)
5. Is internet health information influencing the power balance between patient and doctor and is it empowering the patient?
6. What should be the focus if we want to achieve patient empowerment? And is this the internet as a health information source?

Mixed Research Approach



Deduced Research Question



Does internet health information offset the doctor's aesculapian power?

- **“Aesculapian power”**: “The power the physician possesses by virtue of her training in the discipline and the art or craft of medicine” (Brody, 1992)
- **“Competent authority”**: “a power relation in which the subject obeys the directives of the authority out of belief in the authority’s superior competence or expertise to decide which actions will best serve the subject’s interests and goals” (Wrong, 2009)

- Social power / Second stream (Scott, 2001)

- Focus on strategies and techniques
(not on specific organisations)
- Power is diffused throughout society
(not confined to sovereign organisations)
- Stresses facilitative or 'productive' aspects
(not on repressive aspects)
- Power is not zero-sum

Gramsci, Althusser, Parsons, Foucault

Theory: Power - Knowledge – Trust

- Authority – Legitimacy (Hearn, 2012)
 - Doctor = “Thinner form of authority”
- Power & Knowledge - Foucault
- Trust = Power
 - Trust as “a strategy for the reduction of complexity” (Luhmann, 1979)
 - “Trust is founded on the motivation attributed to behaviour” (Luhmann, 1979)
- Trust – Loyalty – Satisfaction (Reichheld, 2001 – Thomassen, 2008)
- ...

Results

1. Results from the literature research
2. Results from the survey

Results

1. Results from the literature research
2. Results from the survey

Internet as Source of Health Information

1. Conditions & Obstacles linked to the **internet** as a health information source
2. Conditions & Obstacles linked to the health information **seeker**

+ 5 General Obstacles

1. Conditions & Obstacles linked to the **internet** as a health information source
2. Conditions & Obstacles linked to the health information **seeker**

1. Conditions & Obstacles Linked to the Internet as a Health Information Source

- Information \neq knowledge
- Internet = unstructured information source
- Information overload & misinformation
- Some information cannot be found
- The internet is a dynamic information source
- Technical access is a condition
- Some cannot afford pc & connection
- Some refrain from using the internet

1. Conditions & Obstacles linked to the **internet** as a health information source
2. Conditions & Obstacles linked to the health information **seeker**

2. Conditions & Obstacles

Linked to the Health Information Seeker 1

- Looking for information requires literacy
- Looking for health information requires health literacy
- Surfing the net requires internet & IT literacy
- The language issue (English!)
- Specialised information & knowledge may be very “esoteric”
- Looking for information is more than just locating it

2. Conditions & Obstacles

Linked to the Health Information Seeker 2

- People use the internet more for entertainment
- The characteristics of information seeking
- Some do not use the information found
- Some are incompetent

5 General Obstacles

1. Effective care is context-specific
2. Not all patients want to acquire knowledge
3. Some doctors disregard the patient's knowledge
4. Knowledge evolves
5. Knowledge is not zero-sum

Results

1. Results from the literature research
2. Results from the survey

Results

1. Results from the literature research
2. Results from the survey

About the Survey

- October 2012 – July 2013
- 3 771 respondents – 3 071 completed and fulfilled criteria
- Criteria: Belgian nationality + speaking Dutch + not living with parents + having GP + having internet access

Survey

- 38 questions
- Related to:
 - Power
 - Dependency
 - Expert systems
 - Authority
 - Legitimacy
 - Information
 - Status
 - Satisfaction
- Trust
- Risk
- The internet

About the Survey - Profile of the Respondents 1

- Profile of the respondents
- Gender: 62.42% women - 37.58% men
- Age
 - 4.20% between 18 -24 years
 - 19.96% between 25-35 years
 - 19.05% between 36-45 years
 - 24.85% between 46-55 years
 - 20.06% between 56-65 years
 - 8.88% 66 years and older

- Main profession
 - 4,23% independent/artisan/farmer
 - 4.95% member of the board/senior management
 - 46.43% employee/teacher/civil servant
 - 5.67% executive/liberal profession
 - 3.45% worker
 - 3.22% housewife/houseman
 - 2.77% student
 - 20.61% retired
 - 1.86% unemployed
 - 6.81% 'other'

- 97.85% had one GP
- 28.39% considered themselves chronic patients
- 50.41% of the GP's of the respondents had solo practice - 22.63% duo practice - 26.96% group practice
- 74.24% of the members of the same nuclear family went to the same GP

1. Respondents recognise the GP's **medical expertise**
 - 91,4% answered that their GP knows more about medical matters

2. Indications that the majority **trust/have faith** in their GP

- 31,42% calls the doctor the most trustworthy of 8 given professions (manager, journalist, politician, teacher, doctor, judge, scientist)
- 80,07% is loyal to their GP
- 90,59% is satisfied with their GP
- 89,68% trusts that GP keeps the consult confidential
- 73,10% thinks their GP would admit a medical mistake

Results: Survey

Their GP ₃

- 84,92% thinks their GP always does what is the best for them
- Why does someone choose to be a doctor?

1. Because they consider it an interesting profession	47.67%
2. Out of idealism/To help people	39.04%
3. For the status/Out of prestige	5.21%
4. For the money	4.30%
5. Because they like human contact	2.64%
6. Because they want to be self-employed	1.14%

Results: Survey

The internet

1. 42,82% considers the internet a good source of health information – 22,11% states that it is not – 35,07% remain neutral
2. 31,23% regularly have difficulties to find the information they are seeking – 41,13% did not take position
3. 23,51% agrees that “health information on the internet is usually correct” – 51,16% remains neutral – 25,33% disagrees

Link with the Respondents' Profile? 1

- Recognition of medical knowledge of the PG and satisfaction, trust, loyalty, satisfaction, admitting a medical mistake, assuming their GP always does what is best for them : no marked difference in gender, age or profession
- More doubt and denial with persons considering themselves chronic patients - Being a chronic patient is an influencing factor – “The expert patient”?

Link with the Respondents' Profile? 2

- Trust that GP keeps the consult confidential: no difference in gender, or profession + slightly more outspoken negative in age categories 18-24 and 36-45
- Reason for someone to choose to be a doctor: more women say "out of idealism" – substantially more men answered "for the money"

Link with the Respondents' Profile? 3

- The internet is a good source
 - No outspoken gender difference, slightly more men agree entirely
 - Age 25-35 upwards do not agree / 56-65 + 66-75 higher totally agree
 - The retired do agree more / Teachers, clerks and civil servants disagree more
- Difficulties finding information
 - More men neutral
 - More age 46-55 neutral / More age 25-35 agree
 - Profession: only housewives/housemen demonstrate more total agreement

Conclusion

- No strong basis for stating that the internet equals the doctor's medical knowledge, thereby offsetting the GP's aesculapian power
- The information gap may have narrowed, but the expert system is not ruled out
- The use of the internet to acquire health knowledge is conditional
- The internet is not considered a flawless source of health information
- When we want to empower the patient, informing the patient is key, but only one key element
- There is no basis for internet determinism as a tool for patient empowerment

Limitations

- Survey only done through internet research
- The research did not ask if respondents seek for health information on the net: part of the respondents' group give their opinion based on reputation and not experience

Next Steps

Internet survey:
healthy people &
patient

Analyzing 25 GP
consultations

Group discussions:
healthy people &
patients + expert
interviews:
communication
teachers

Group discussions:
GP's



Contact Information

- eeeckman@vub.ac.be
- Follow Edgard on twitter: #eekman

