Assessment Strategies: How Patients Cope with the Diverse Quality Levels of Websites when Searching for Health Information

Samantha Adams (MA)
PhD Student
Erasmus University Medical Center
Department of Health Policy and Management
Rotterdam, the Netherlands

The quality of online medical information available for patients has long been a concern of health care professionals. [1-4] Although initiatives exist for patients to use when searching for information, there is the concern that these initiatives are either ineffective or even counter-productive. [5-6] Another criticism is that initiatives do not sufficiently achieve their respective goals. [7-8] It is important to consider that many initiatives have been designed with patients in mind, but not with patients involved. Various portals, seals, rating systems, ethical codes, etc., exist ostensibly for patients, but arose largely without concrete input from real patients-as-end-users. Literature addressing usability on the basis of studies assessing real patients' searching behaviors appeared only in 2002. [9-11] The conclusions from these studies, while insightful, reflect the need for ongoing research into the daily practices of patients searching for web-based health care information. This poster highlights the first results of a systematic ethnographic study (interviews and shadow-searching carried out between November, 2001 and August, 2003) to determine how patients approach health care information when searching on the internet and illustrates the different strategies that patients use to assess the health information they encounter on the web.

References
1. Gottlieb, S. 2000. Health information on the internet is often unreliable. BMJ (321), p 136.
2. Kiley, R. 2000. He@lth information on the Internet: Quackery on the web. Internet magazine (June). http://www.internet-magazine.com . Last accessed: August 2000.
3. Cho, M. 2000. Guidelines for advertising on health websites: Who's guarding the Koop? WJM (172), p 230-232.
4. Keating D. 1997. Cyberhealth: Health sites on the internet abound, but consumer with care. Salt Lake Tribune: Salt Lake City, Utah. 18 October.
5. Eysenbach, G. 2000. Towards ethical guidelines for e-health: JMIR Theme Issue on eHealth ethics. Journal of Medical Internet Research (2:1), p e7. http://www.jmir.org/2000/1/e7/index.htm . Last accessed: February 2003.
6. Delamothe, T. 2000. Quality of websites: Kitemarketing the west wind. BMJ (321), p 843-844.
7. Risk, A. 2002. Commentary: On the way to quality. BMJ (324), p 601-602.
8. Gagliardi, A. and A.R. Jadad, 2002. Examination of instruments used to rate quality of health information on the internet: chronicle of a voyage with an unclear destination. BMJ (324), p 569-573.
9. Eysenbach, G. and C. Kohler, 2002. How do consumers search for and appraise health information on the world wide web? Qualitative study using focus groups, usability tests and in-depth interviews. BMJ (324), p 573-577.
10. Stanford, J., E.R Tauber, B.J. Fogg, and L. Marable. 2002. Experts vs. online consumers: A comparative credibility study of health and finance websites. Report of research by Sliced Bread Design, Stanford Persuasive Technology Lab and Consumer WebWatch. October.
11. Fogg, B.J., C. Soohoo, D. Danielsen, L. Marable, J. Stanford and E.R. Tauber. 2002. How do people evaluate a web site's credibility? Results from a Large Study. Report of research by the Stanford University Persuasive Technology Lab, Consumer Web Watch, and Sliced Bread Design. October.