

ELECTRONIC DOCTOR-PATIENT COMMUNICATION

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Objectives: Studies have shown that patients want to communicate with their doctors via e-mail (Andreassen, Sandaune, et al., 2002). But even though the use of e-mail communication between doctors and their patients is growing, there is a gap between the patient demand and the actual provision of such services in most countries. The patients' conviction that e-mail contact with their doctor would be an advantage is not always shared by the doctors. The arguments in favor of e-mail are often linked to the empowering potentials for the patients, and to effectiveness and flexibility in the interaction. Among health providers there is a fear that e-mails will be difficult to manage and fuel unnecessary demand, as well as undermine important aspects of the patient-doctor relationship. The discussions on potential concerns and benefits from using electronic communication in the doctor-patient relationship should be based on research rather than intuition.

Methods: In this presentation knowledge from five years of working in the field will be summed up. Results from pilot studies and trailing research, including a randomized controlled study (Kummervold, Trondsen, et al., 2004) and three qualitative studies (Andreassen, Trondsen, et al., 2006; Danielsen, 2002), will be presented.

Results: Health personnel and patients agree that the advantages of using electronic communication exceed the disadvantages. Electronic communication appears to replace some consultations and inquiries by telephone. Patients who have not yet used electronic communication think they will do so in the future. The level of trust in the doctor – patient relationship is of importance to the use of technology.

Conclusions: Internet and e-mail access will probably improve along with new technology and lower costs; hence e-mail could be an easy channel to reach patients in the future. The use of electronic communication technology and the doctor – patient relationship influence each other both-way.

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