



Current literature

An annotated bibliography of articles relevant to the study and use of the Internet in the healthcare environment. Compiled by Betsy Anagnostelis

Jenkins JM et al.

Medical education with the Internet: a pilot training programme in reproductive medicine. *Br J Obstet Gynaecol* 2001; 108: 114-6

This article describes an interactive case study course in reproductive medicine, delivered during 1998 from the Centre for Reproductive Medicine in Bristol. A total of 18 obstetrics and gynaecology trainee doctors participated. A Web site software program (FrontPage) was used to present five monthly problem-based case studies, which were also sent by post to the participating trainees. E-mail and a Web site discussion board were used by the trainees to reply to set questions. Formal evaluation demonstrated that there was high overall satisfaction among both trainees and trainers, with only four trainees being unable to participate due to technological difficulties. Low levels of participation among the trainees were linked to several factors, including lack of familiarity with electronic bulletin board-based communication and reluctance to make statements publicly. Later courses resulted in universal participation and included introductions among trainees at the beginning of the course and the award of a course certificate on completion. The authors conclude that, despite being a barrier for some, IT helps to overcome other barriers such as geographical separation.

Johnson KB et al.

Hopkins Teen Central: Assessment of an internet-based support system for children with cystic fibrosis. *Pediatrics* 2001; 107: E24

This study explored issues surrounding the use of an electronic support group (ESG) by adolescents with cystic fibrosis (CF), especially the participants' perceptions of their disease, peer support and assessment of the usefulness of ESGs. A highly interactive ESG was

developed and 18 teenagers (median age 13 years) with CF agreed to participate in the study. As less than 50% of the participants had access to a home computer, the ESG site was designed to accommodate WebTV access, with which the remainder of the participants were provided. Those with home computers were found to have accessed the site more frequently. There seemed to be no significant improvement in knowledge about CF, or in perceptions surrounding the usefulness of the Internet as a support environment. However, participants demonstrated a significant change in their perceptions about access to other adolescents with CF, resulting in four participants later expressing the wish to meet. The authors conclude that teenagers with a chronic disease are likely to participate effectively in an ESG, which, if carefully designed, is likely to provide significant benefits and few risks.

Jones JM et al.

More than just a pamphlet: development of an innovative computer-based education program for cancer patients. *Patient Educ Couns* 2001; 44: 271-81

The Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH) computer-based patient education programme in oncology consists of an interactive Intranet Web site that provides information about cancer, library resources, Internet links, information about PMH services and a calendar of events. During the study, the Intranet site was accessible on computers in the patient and family resource centres within the cancer site-based waiting areas throughout the hospital and also in the PMH patient and family library. Trained volunteers provided personal assistance to users of each resource centre. A pre-launch pilot study evaluated ease of use, content relevance and the format of the Web site. Features that were identified as

particularly valuable by users included the provision of answers to users' questions, graphics and virtual reality presentations, informative animation sequences and engaging survivor stories. The formative evaluation indicated that the site was easy to use, informative and enjoyable for patients as well as families, volunteers and health professionals.

Wright SM et al.

Physician opinion about electronic publications. *Am J Med* 2001; 110: 373-7

Physicians' opinions and attitudes to electronic journals were investigated by a 3-page questionnaire in this study, conducted in early 1999 at Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center (a large university-affiliated teaching hospital in Baltimore, MD, USA). Issues were explored that could influence physicians' acceptance: effect on quality, prestige of authorship, the transition to a paperless state, convenience, and aspects of interactive reading. The majority believed that ejournals would decrease clutter, be more environmentally friendly and make it easier to find previously read articles. Most also appreciated the ability to link from one article to related articles and Web sites. However, the majority also felt they would miss the convenience of being able to read a journal anywhere and half feared that they would become overwhelmed by the amount of information being published. Furthermore, 26% believed that ejournals would lead to lower quality of work being published and 25% believed that prestige of authorship would be lessened, with those who published more actively expressing the greatest concerns.

Betsy Anagnostelis, Medical Library, Royal Free and University College Medical School of UCL, London. Betsy can be contacted at ucylbet@ucl.ac.uk