

Does patients' access to their own data affect their health or health care services?

E-health services for the general public have been developed for several years. Advanced applications can play a significant role in the production of health care services. E-health services provide new opportunities for organizing health care services, monitoring their use, obtaining feedback and improving the quality of services. E-health services are assumed, for example, to support public well-being, health maintenance and promotion, disease prevention, and also people's own health and self-care management, to enhance communication between patients and health care professionals, and improve opportunities for ordinary people to participate in the planning of services

The emergence of these e-health services has enabled the general public to play a more active role in their care. The individual's role is changing from that of a passive patient to an informed patient and further to a responsible, autonomous and competent partner in his or her own care. The active integration of the patient into his/her treatment offers numerous potential benefits, such as improving the quality of care as well as the compliance of the patient.

One e-health service is to give the patient access to the providers' clinical documentation. The idea of providing patients with access to clinical information is not new. Traditionally, this has been done by providing patients with paper copies of extracts from clinical documents. The effects of access to clinical documentation in paper form has been found to have potential for modest benefits in patient care, for example in enhancing doctor-patient communication, with only minimal risks such as increasing the patient's worry or confusion.

Some studies have reported the benefits of e-health services, for example as enhancing communication, but also raised concerns among the public regarding the confidentiality and comprehensibility of the content. These e-health services consist of provider-linked applications that allow patients to electronically access health information documented and managed by a health care institution.

According some studies people were better-informed while accessing their clinical information. People are interested in accessing their patient records, and they find it helpful and useful. These findings, however, do not guarantee that there is in fact a measurable impact on health.

Studies in which an e-health service was combined with further services, such as secure messaging, interactive decision support or health-related reminders, had a more positive impact on patient outcomes, patient-provider communication, disease management and patient satisfaction. It might well be more effective to actively guide and coach people than merely to present clinical information without further explanation.

The use of e-health services is often seen as a means of empowering people and improving patient care, yet the available evidence does not support this assumption. Further studies are needed to investigate this question.

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