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Empowerment of patients in online discussions about medicine use

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Patient empowerment is crucial in the successful self-management of people with chronic diseases. We investigated whether discussions about medicine use taking place on online message boards contribute to patient empowerment. From seven Dutch message boards, we analyzed posts related to the conditions ADHD, ALS and diabetes by a deductive thematic analysis method and coded the posts for empowerment processes and the quality of the information exchanged. Patient empowerment processes were identified in posts related to all three disorders. There is some variation in the frequency of these processes, but they show a similar order in the results: Patients used the online message boards to exchange information, share personal experiences and for empathy or support. The type of information shared in these processes could contribute to the patient's self-efficacy when it comes to medicine use. The exchanged information was either correct or largely harmless. We also observed a tendency whereby participants correct previously posted incorrect information, and refer people to a healthcare professional following a request for medical advice, e.g. concerning the choice of medication or dosage. Our findings show that patient empowerment processes occur in posts related to all three disorders and that the type of information shared can contribute to the patient's self-efficacy when it comes to medicine use. The tendency to refer people to a healthcare professional shows that patients still reserve an important role for healthcare professionals in the care process, despite the development towards more self-management.

Biography

Ingrid Hegger completed her PharmD at Utrecht University of Utrecht and is a Senior Researcher at the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment, The Netherlands. She is an expert on the regulation of medicinal products, with special interest in biologicals. Currently, her focus is on "close-to-policy" projects in the field of medical products, pharmaceutical care and health policy. She is project leader of project 'e-Medication' on the influence of internet on medicines use and involved in projects on the EU regulatory system for medicinal products and clinical trials. Furthermore, she is working on her PhD in a strategic research project on the utilization of knowledge within public health policy and healthcare supervision.

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