

m-Health related information seeking behaviour for chronic conditions and medications in patients, health professionals and health science students

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Background Use of mobile electronic devices to access information in relation to medications and chronic conditions is increasingly becoming common practice for many patients and health professionals. However, more research is needed to explore how various users use these devices and what motivates them.

Purpose This study aims to explore m-Health related information seeking behaviour in patients, health professionals and health science students with focus on chronic conditions and medications.

Method Six focus groups were conducted, two with health science students (age: 18-25 years), two with health professionals (age 30-55 years) and two with patients (age: 30-70 years) with chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension. Each focus group contained between 4-7 participants, recruited purposively. Focus groups lasted between 40-50 minutes and were conducted by an independent facilitator to minimize bias. The audio-recorded data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically.

Findings Three main themes were highlighted in discussions referring to the activation of patients. They pertained to a) motives for seeking information on health and medication, b) patient activation level, and c) impact of mobile electronic devices on patient activation. A number of subthemes were identified too. Use of electronic mobile devices to search for information about chronic conditions and medications was supported by health professionals and students, but only partially by patient participants. Our findings suggest that there are differences between patients, health professionals and health science students in m-Health related information seeking behaviour. The identified motives to seek health information via electronic mobile devices were easy information access, abundant and detailed information, shortened time of information search, provision of updates and comfort to find information at any time and place. In this regard, the main motive for patients was greater amount of accessible information and the provision of a wider range of information related to their health status. Despite advantages of using electronic mobile devices, patients still considered health professionals as key to obtaining reliable information about medications and chronic conditions.

Conclusion There are differences between patients, health professionals and health science students in their behaviour to use electronic mobile devices to seek chronic condition and medication related information. These differences pertained not only to the support for use itself but also in relation to their motives, needs and specific actions related to use of electronic mobile devices. There is a need to customize interventions with the view of improving m-Health related information seeking behaviour, depending on the population target group.