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# HEALTH SPECTRUM

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## Is cyber medicine killing you?

Barry Nelson  
22/10/2004

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While the Internet can make us into instant experts on our health, a new report suggests that a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing. Health correspondent BARRY NELSON reports.

PATIENTS using the Internet to find out information about chronic disease rather than listening to their doctor could be putting their health at risk, according to researchers. Using interactive computer tools, such as online support groups and chatrooms, does help improve the knowledge of people with conditions such as asthma and diabetes and provides positive feelings of social support. But researchers from University College London have come to the conclusion that there was no evidence that "cyber medicine" helped people change their behaviour.

They even say there is evidence that using interactive services may actually leave patients in worse health.

The team, led by Dr Elizabeth Murray from the Department of Primary Care and Population Sciences, reviewed 28 trials involving more than 4,000 participants to measure the effectiveness of Interactive Health Communication Applications (IHCAs).

These were defined as a computerbased information sources combined with one or more additional services, such as online support groups, chatrooms or tailored advice based on data provided by the user.

The researchers found that the IHCAs had a positive effect on people gaining information and feelings of social support. But they concluded that the applications had no effect on making patients believe that changing their behaviour for the better was possible or in actually resulting in behaviour change.

They also said that they had a "strikingly negative effect" on health outcomes, leaving some in worse health.

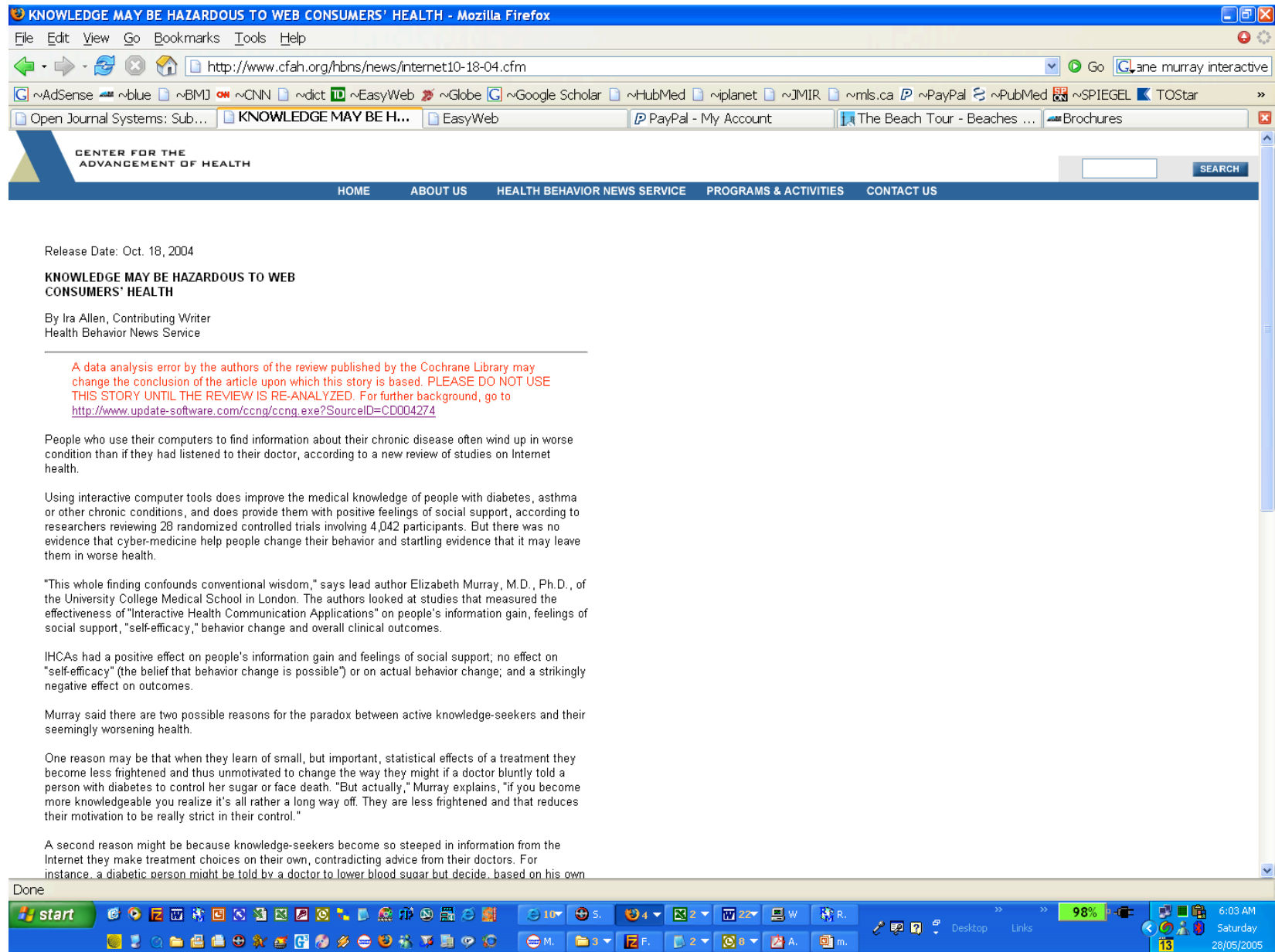
Dr Murray says there were a number of reasons why there was an apparent contradiction between actively seeking knowledge and patients' seemingly worse health. One reason was that when patients learn of small but important statistical effects of their treatment, they become less frightened.

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Web Not Always Safe Health Source for Some

Doesn't help people with diabetes and other chronic diseases change behavior

THURSDAY, Oct. 21 (HealthDayNews) -- Internet-based health information may be hazardous to people with chronic diseases such as diabetes or asthma, say University College London researchers.

They reviewed 28 studies on health information from the Web and found that using interactive computer tools does help people improve their medical knowledge and provides them with positive feelings of social support.

But the study found no evidence that Web health information helps people with chronic diseases make behavior changes that will benefit them. In fact, people who use computers to access information about their disease often end up in worse condition than if they had listened to their doctor.

"This whole finding confounds conventional wisdom," study author Dr. Elizabeth Murray, of the department of primary care and population sciences, said in a prepared statement.

She said patients who access a lot of Web-based health information may decide to make their own treatment choices, even if those decisions are contrary to a doctor's advice.

For example, a person with diabetes may be told by a doctor to lower blood sugar. But, based on his or her own interpretation of data from the Internet, the patient may decide the short-term tradeoffs of not controlling blood sugar are worth the long-term risks.

Murray added that increased knowledge about their disease and treatment may also make people less frightened and less motivated to be strict about their control of diabetes or other chronic diseases.

The study appears in the October issue of the *Cochrane Collaboration*.

More information

The U.S. National Institutes of Health has information about healthy Web surfing .

SOURCE: University College London, news release, Oct. 17, 2004

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Health

October 23, 2004

Body&Soul: Stories behind the news

Internet makes us sick

BY SIMON CROMPTON

Does surfing for health information do you more harm than good?

HEALTH websites are second only to porn pages in popularity and many doctors have viewed internet information as similarly corrupting.

But, just as there are signs that doctors are beginning to embrace our thirst for health knowledge as a force for good, a new study defies all our expectations.

An authoritative review by the Department of Primary Care and Population Sciences, at University College London, has come to the conclusion that people who use their computer to find out more about their condition end up in worse health than those who do not.

Elizabeth Murray found that people with chronic conditions such as diabetes and asthma who accessed computer resources did benefit in some ways — their medical knowledge improved and they felt supported. But when it came to actually changing their behaviour to make themselves more healthy, they failed miserably. What's more, they ended up in worse health than those who didn't consult the internet at all.

This wasn't meant to happen. Conventionally, knowledge-seekers are believed to benefit from better health.

Dr Murray thinks there could be two explanations. Either it's because the more learned we are, the less frightened we become and less motivated to make lifestyle changes. Or we become so confused by conflicting information we get from doctors and the internet that we make our own, sometimes unaided decisions.

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## Too much information bad for your health, study shows

18 Oct 2004

A study published by University College London has found that people suffering from chronic illnesses such as diabetes or asthma who use software or the internet to get information can actually end up damaging their own health.

The review, which appears in the latest issue of the Cochrane Collaboration, found that in one instance, diabetics who followed healthcare advice from the internet had more sugar in their blood than those that didn't.

"This whole finding confounds conventional wisdom," said Dr Elizabeth Murray, head author of the study.

One reason suggested for this is when people see unfiltered information about, for instance, effects of the treatment of diabetes, without it being put into perspective it discourages them from moderating their behaviour to control their sugar. "If you become more knowledgeable, you realise it's all rather a long way off. They are less frightened and that reduces their motivation to be really strict in their control." Another could be that advice on the internet could superficially contradict that of clinicians.

Furthermore, just because good advice was available, says Dr Murray, doesn't mean that people will follow it. "If knowledge is all that was needed to promote healthy behaviour, smoking would not be as prevalent as it is," said the report.

Another problem that healthcare providers could suffer is that people who have been informed of different ways their illness could be treated might demand to receive the least cost-effective treatments available.

Dr Murray said that more research was needed to fully study the negative effects the flood of information available over the internet has on people's health, and how health websites can be structured to counter this. Nevertheless, the study did conclude that computer-based learning was effective and that this could be harnessed.

The Cochrane Collaboration is an international organisation that uses evidence-based, systematic reviews to evaluate existing medical research about topics, and draws conclusions based on the quality of the information available.

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## Warning over bad health advice online

18 Oct 2004

Following health advice given on the Internet could leave people in worse health, a new study has warned.

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The research from University College London (UCL) has shown that many people would be in a better state of health if they followed advice from their doctor rather than relying on information found online.

Although the UCL team found that using the Internet improves people's knowledge of medical conditions, the evidence suggests that so-called "cyber-medicine" does not help people change their behaviour.

One explanation could be that the more people know about a disease, the less concerned they become about the effect it will have on them.

People are less frightened when they discover more about an illness such as [diabetes](#), because they realise there is no immediate threat and are therefore not motivated to change their habits.

Lead researcher Elizabeth Murray suggested people could be making their own decisions as to how they should best treat an illness based on information they have found over the Internet, ignoring their doctor's advice.

Such an approach has led to many people actually being worse off than if they had not found out anything about their

condition.

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### Value Of Internet Health Advice Questioned

A [University College London](#) study suggests that many people with chronic disease should not rely on the internet for health advice.

The study found interactive computer tools do improve medical knowledge, but found no evidence that they change behaviour positively. In fact, some evidence suggested that they left people in worse health.

The UCL team reviewed the effect of interactive web tools - known technically as Interactive Health Communication Applications (IHCAs) - on people with long-term conditions such as diabetes and asthma.

In total they looked at 28 studies covering 4,042 participants.

Lead researcher Dr Elizabeth Murray said she was surprised that the tools seemed to boost medical knowledge, but, if anything, have a negative effect on the users' health.

Dr Murray said one reason for this apparent paradox may be that titbits of information may lull users into a false sense of security.

Thus they become less motivated to control their condition in the way they would be if faced with a blunt instruction from a doctor.

Alternatively, users may become so steeped in information that they make treatment choices on their own, contradicting advice from their doctors.

For instance, a diabetic person might be told by a doctor to lower blood sugar but decide, based on his own interpretation of data, that the short-term tradeoffs of not complying are worth the long-term risks.

Dr Murray said: "We found that people who use these things had more sugar in their blood than those who didn't."

The researchers say more work is needed to fully understand the negative effect of interactive health applications on clinical outcomes - and whether some computer health programs can be designed to improve them.

The UCL team defined an IHCA as a computer-based information source combined with one or more additional services, such as an on-line support group, chat room or tailored advice based on data provided by the user.

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Knowledge may be hazardous to web consumers' health

18 October 2004 -- People who use their computers to find information about their chronic disease often wind up in worse condition than if they had listened to their doctor, according to a University College London (UCL) review of studies on internet health.

Using interactive computer tools does improve the medical knowledge of people with diabetes, asthma or other chronic conditions, and does provide them with positive feelings of social support, according to researchers reviewing 28 randomized controlled trials involving 4,042 participants. But there was no evidence that cyber-medicine helps people change their behavior and startling evidence that it may leave them in worse health.

"This whole finding confounds conventional wisdom," says lead author Dr Elizabeth Murray of UCL's Department of Primary Care and Population Sciences. The authors looked at studies that measured the effectiveness of Interactive Health Communication Applications (IHCAs) on people's information gain, feelings of social support, self-efficacy, behavior change and overall clinical outcomes.

IHCAs had a positive effect on people's information gain and feelings of social support; no effect on self-efficacy (the belief that behavior change is possible) or on actual behavior change; and a strikingly negative effect on outcomes.

Dr Murray said there are two possible reasons for the paradox between active knowledge-seekers and their seemingly worsening health.

One reason may be that when they learn of small, but important, statistical effects of a treatment they become less frightened and thus unmotivated to change the way they might if a doctor bluntly told a person with diabetes to control her sugar or face death. "But actually," Murray explains, "if you become more knowledgeable you realize it's all rather a long way off. They are less frightened and that reduces their motivation to be really strict in their control."

A second reason might be because knowledge-seekers become so steeped in information from the Internet they make treatment choices on their own, contradicting advice from their doctors. For instance, a diabetic person might be told by a doctor to lower blood sugar but decide, based on his own interpretation of data, that the

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### People who use their computers to find health information often wind up in worse condition than if they had listened to their doctor

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A second reason might be because knowledge-seekers become so steeped in information from the Internet they make treatment choices on their own, contradicting advice from their doctors. For instance, a diabetic person might be told by a doctor to lower blood sugar but decide, based on his own interpretation of data, that the short-term tradeoffs of not complying are worth the long-term risks.

"We found that people who use these things (IHCAs) had more sugar in their blood than those who didn't," Dr Murray said.

The researchers cannot explain the finding that the interventions had no effect on behavior change but nevertheless resulted in worse outcomes. Murray and her team conclude that more research is needed to fully understand the negative effect of interactive health applications on clinical outcomes and whether some computer health programs can be designed to improve them.

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## Warning on internet health advice

**People with chronic disease should think twice before relying on the internet for health advice, research suggests.**

A University College London study found many would be in a better condition if they had simply listened to their doctor's advice.

The web has a mine of medical information.

The study found interactive computer tools do improve medical knowledge.

But there was no evidence they change behaviour positively, and some that they left people in worse health.

The UCL team reviewed the effect of interactive web tools - known technically as Interactive Health Communication Applications (IHCAs) - on people with long-term conditions such as diabetes and asthma.

In total they looked at 28 studies covering 4,042 participants.

Lead researcher Dr Elizabeth Murray said she was surprised that the tools seemed to boost medical knowledge, but, if anything, have a negative effect on the users' health.

### Paradox

Dr Murray said one reason for this apparent paradox may be that titbits of information may lull users into a false sense of security.

Thus they become less motivated to control their condition in the way they would be if faced with a blunt instruction from a doctor.

Alternatively, users may become so steeped in information that they make treatment choices on their own, contradicting advice from their doctors.

For instance, a diabetic person might be told by a doctor to

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### Internet-based health information may be hazardous: study

Last Updated Mon, 18 Oct 2004 14:55:28 EDT  
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LONDON - People with chronic diseases ought to pay more attention to what their doctor tells them rather than relying on advice from the internet, according to a new study.

Researchers at University College London reviewed clinical trials that measured the effectiveness of computer-based tools called Interactive Health Communication Applications.

The tools are usually web-based health packages that combine information with an online support group or chat room.



Cyber-medicine improved medical knowledge among people with chronic conditions such as diabetes or asthma, the team found.

*The web may help patients to find social supports but they may not fair as well.*

But there was no evidence patients changed their behaviour for the better, and some were left in worse health, the researchers found.

One reason for the paradox is patients may be lulled into a false of security online and therefore they're less motivated to act to improve their health.

Or users may rely on the internet information although it contradicts their doctor's advice. For example, a diabetic may decide the long-term risks of not lowering her blood sugar are worth the short-term gains.

"We found that people who use these [tools] had more sugar in their blood than those who didn't," said the study's lead author, Dr. Elizabeth Murray.

Murray's team reviewed 28 randomized controlled trials involving 4,042 participants.

"Consumers who wish to increase their knowledge or social support amongst people with a similar problem may find an IHCA helpful," the researchers concluded. "However, consumers whose primary aim is to achieve optimal clinical outcomes should not use an IHCA at present."

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## Web Not Always Safe Health Source for Some

October 21, 2004 08:40:57 PM PST

THURSDAY, Oct. 21 (HealthDayNews) -- Internet-based health information may be hazardous to people with chronic diseases such as diabetes or asthma, say University College London researchers.

They reviewed 28 studies on health information from the Web and found that using interactive computer tools does help people improve their medical knowledge and provides them with positive feelings of social support.

But the study found no evidence that Web health information helps people with chronic diseases make behavior changes that will benefit them. In fact, people who use computers to access information about their disease often end up in worse condition than if they had listened to their doctor.

"This whole finding confounds conventional wisdom," study author Dr. Elizabeth Murray, of the department of primary care and population sciences, said in a prepared statement.

She said patients who access a lot of Web-based health information may decide to make their own treatment choices, even if those decisions are contrary to a doctor's advice.

For example, a person with diabetes may be told by a doctor to lower

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TIME Magazine Archive Article -- Click To Get Sick? -- Nov. 01, 2004 - Mozilla Firefox

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## Click To Get Sick?

People who get medical advice from the Web actually get worse, a study shows  
By [SANJAY GUPTA](#)

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Nov. 1, 2004

There's a running gag in Floater, Calvin Trillin's 1980 comic novel about a newsmagazine that sounds a lot like TIME, in which the medicine writer comes down with the symptoms of whatever disease he's writing about that week. I was reminded of that hapless writer when I read about a new study out of University College London that found that people who use the Web to get information about their chronic diseases often wind up in worse shape than before they logged on. Could the medical information on the Internet actually be making people ill? Not exactly, says Dr. Elizabeth Murray of the college's...

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## So viel Information war nie

20.10.04 - Und doch sind Internetnutzer oft die weniger vernünftigen Patienten. Auch MS-Betroffene sollten wachsam mit dem Medium umgehen.

Wie eine Meta-Analyse der Cochrane Collaboration zeigt, ist der informierte Patient nicht unbedingt der vernünftige Patient. Das Internet gehört zu den computergestützten Paketen, die idealerweise unter Kontrolle von Gutachtern Gesundheitsinformationen für Patienten anbieten, um diese bei Entscheidungen zu unterstützen und nach Möglichkeit eine positive Veränderung des Verhaltens zu bewirken. Solche seriösen Angebote erreichen jedoch nicht immer ihr Ziel, so die Einschätzung von Dr. Elizabeth Murray, die für die Cochrane Collaboration acht randomisierte kontrollierte Studien zur computergesteuerten Gesundheitsinfo in einer Meta-Analyse zusammengefasst hat.

Das Ergebnis scheint zunächst positiv: Im Vergleich zum Arztgespräch sind die übers Netz geschulten Patienten besser über ihre eigene Krankheit informiert. Auch erfahren sie eine gewünschte soziale Unterstützung. Die erhoffte Verhaltensänderung tritt jedoch nicht ein. Schlimmer noch: In einigen Studien verhalten sich diese Patienten weniger vernünftig als Patienten, die ihrem Arzt vertrauen. Vor allem chronisch Kranke laufen Gefahr, vor lauter Informationsflut das eigentliche Ziel aus den Augen zu verlieren.

Dies erläutert Murray am Beispiel eines Diabetikers: Wenn dieser von seinem Arzt eindringlich auf die negativen Folgen einer schlechten Blutzuckereinstellung hingewiesen wird, habe dies häufig eine nachhaltigere Wirkung, als wenn der gleiche Patient sich später im Internet über die wissenschaftlichen Grundlagen des ärztlichen Ratschlags informiert. Dort erfährt er nämlich, dass ein erhöhter Blutzucker kurzzeitig keine negativen Auswirkungen hat, was der Arzt ihm in der verkürzten Darstellung verschwiegen haben mag. Doch wenn mit Desinformationen auch in einem Internetforum oder

www.junge-initiativen.de

Die Plattform für junge MS-Betroffene der AMSEL

Die AMSEL-Kontaktgruppe in Ihrer Nähe

Gesundheitsreform

"Mit dem Gesetz können alle Beteiligten leben."

Ulla Schmidt

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SvD: Sjuka blir sjukare när de hämtar kunskap på nätet - Mozilla Firefox

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Publicerat 18 oktober 2004 07:00

## Sjuka blir sjukare när de hämtar kunskap på nätet

Sjuka personer som använder internet för att få information om sin sjukdom får visserligen mer kunskap, men deras hälsa försämras i stället för att förbättras. Det överraskande resultatet kom fram i den första omfattande studien av vilka effekter de många hälsosajterna har.

Om du är eller blir sjuk så undvik att surfa på de otaliga hälsosajterna på nätet. Du riskerar nämligen att bli sämre i din sjukdom. Den oväntade rekommendationen kan utläsas i den första undersökningen av vilka effekter det stora hälsoutbudet på internet har på människor med kroniska sjukdomar. Information om medicin och hälsa är det enskilt största ämnesområdet på internet.

Bakom analysen står det prestigefyllda Cochrane, ett internationellt nätverk av forskare som sysslar med att kvalitetsmäta och utvärdera all tillgänglig medicinsk forskning. I detta fall är det en grupp utvärderare under ledning av forskare vid University College London i Storbritannien som analyserat alla studier av hur internets hälsosajter påverkar sjuka personer. De hittade 28 olika studier där grupper av sjuka internetanvändare jämfördes med andra som inte surfar. Samtliga av de över 4 000 deltagande patienter led av livslånga sjukdomar, främst diabetes och astma. De aktuella hälsosajterna var interaktiva och höll hög kvalitet. De innehöll alltså inte enbart ren medicinsk information utan gav också möjlighet att ställa frågor till experter och chatta med andra sajtläsare.

Internetanvändarna var som väntat mer informerade om sin sjukdom än andra och de tyckte också att de hade fått ett större socialt nätverk. Men trots detta hade de inte kunnat börja leva mer hälsosamt. Och det mest paradoxala var att internetanvändarna faktiskt blev sämre i sin sjukdom. Skillnaderna i hälsa jämfördes med de sjuka som inte surfade kunde tydligt mätas i till exempel blodsockernivåer. Forskarna själva är lika förvånade som alla andra och menar att sjukdomsförvärringen är oförklarlig och kräver ytterligare

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I!Please Note!

The review "Interactive Health Communication Applications for people with chronic disease" by Elizabeth Murray, Jo Burns, Sharon See Tai, Rosalind Lai, Irwin Nazareth, published on issue 4 2004 of The Cochrane Library, has been found to contain an error. This meant the direction of change was incorrect for several clinical and behavioural outcomes.

The authors and editorial team have responded immediately, and will be withdrawing the review from The Cochrane Library for revision to correct the error. The authors and editorial team apologise to all concerned.

An official statement has been posted here: <http://www.mrw.interscience.wiley.com/cochrane/clsysrev/articles/CD004274/frame.html>

Please do not use information from the following release until the review has been re-analysed

18 October 2004

**Knowledge may be hazardous to web consumers' health**

People who use their computers to find information about their chronic disease often wind up in worse condition than if they had listened to their doctor, according to a University College London (UCL) review of studies on internet health.

Using interactive computer tools does improve the medical knowledge of people with diabetes, asthma or other chronic conditions, and does provide them with positive feelings of social support, according to researchers reviewing 28 randomized controlled trials involving 4,042 participants. But there was no evidence that cyber-medicine helps people change their behavior and startling evidence that it may leave them in worse health.

"This whole finding confounds conventional wisdom," says lead author Dr Elizabeth Murray of UCL's Department of Primary Care and Population Sciences. The authors looked at studies that measured the effectiveness of Interactive Health Communication Applications (IHCAs) on people's information gain, feelings of social support, self-efficacy, behavior change and overall clinical outcomes.

IHCAs had a positive effect on people's information gain and feelings of social support; no effect on self-efficacy (the belief that behavior change is possible) or on actual behavior change; and a strikingly negative effect on outcomes.

Dr Murray said there are two possible reasons for the paradox between active knowledge-seekers and their seemingly worsening health.

One reason may be that when they learn of small, but important, statistical effects of a treatment they become less frightened and thus unmotivated to change the way they might if a doctor bluntly told a person with diabetes to control her sugar or face death. "But actually," Murray explains, "if you become more knowledgeable you realize it's all rather a long way off. They are less frightened and that reduces their motivation to be really strict in their control."

A second reason might be because knowledge-seekers become so steeped in information from the Internet they make treatment choices on their own, contradicting advice from their doctors. For instance, a diabetic person might be told by a doctor to lower blood sugar but decide, based on his own interpretation of data, that the short-term tradeoffs of not complying are worth the long-term risks.

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**TOO MUCH ADVICE CAN BE BAD FOR YOUR HEALTH**

Some people with chronic health problems who seek online advice would be better off just listening to their doctors, new research suggests. While advice provided over the Internet generally helps patients improve medical knowledge, it doesn't do much to actually improve their health, according to scientists at University College London. In fact, some people who relied mostly on the online advice were found to be in poorer health than those who were mostly counseled by their doctors. Lead researcher Dr Elizabeth Murray suggested that advice found online might lead some people to make treatment choices on their own, contradicting recommendations from their doctors, reported BBC News Online. Internet-based advice also tends to be less dramatic and frightening, perhaps lessening patients' feelings of urgency, Murray speculated. Her study involving more than 4000 patients is published by the Cochrane Collaboration, an international organisation that evaluates medical research. (Health Scout)

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### Beware of Internet health advises

18:59 2004-10-18

According to new British study, patients who use the internet to find out information about chronic disease rather than listening to their doctor could be putting their health at risk.

Using interactive computer tools, such as online support groups and chatrooms, does help improve the knowledge of people with conditions such as asthma and diabetes and provides social support.

But researchers from University College London said there was no evidence that "cyber-medicine" helped people change their behaviour.

They said there was evidence using interactive services may actually leave patients in [worse health](#), reports informs The Scotsman.

Suppose 1,000 patients who take their medicine reduce the number of heart attacks for their group by half a dozen. Doctors will say this proves patients should take their medicine, she said.

But a patient may see this the other way around. The financial cost and perhaps side-effects of the medication might be too great when the chances are greater than 99 per cent that it won't bring him or her any benefit.

"You might say, 'Do I want the unpleasantness of taking medicine for a small risk reduction?'" she said. If this is an informed decision, then it may make sense for the patient.

"It's important not to see this negative clinical outcome as necessarily negative from the patient's point of view," informs Canada.com.

Dr. Murray said there are two possible reasons for the paradox between active knowledge-seekers and their seemingly worsening health. One, that when they learn of small, but important, statistical effects of a treatment they become less frightened and thus unmotivated to change the way they might if a doctor bluntly told a person with diabetes to control her sugar or face death. Two, knowledge-seekers become so steeped in information from the Internet they make treatment choices on their own, contradicting advice from their doctors.

"But actually, if you become more knowledgeable you realize it's all rather a long way off. They are less frightened and that reduces their motivation to be really strict in their control. We found that people who use these things (IHCA's) had more [sugar in their blood](#) than those who didn't," Murray said, informs New Kerala.



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Scotsman.com News - Health - Fears over health 'cures' on the web - Mozilla Firefox

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## Health

Evening News Mon 18 Oct 2004

printer friendly email article

### Fears over health 'cures' on the web

LYNDSAY MOSS

PATIENTS who use the internet to find out information about chronic disease rather than listening to their doctor could be putting their health at risk, research suggested today.

Using interactive computer tools, such as online support groups and chatrooms, does help improve the knowledge of people with conditions such as asthma and diabetes and provides social support.

But researchers from University College London said there was no evidence that "cyber-medicine" helped people change their behaviour.

They said there was evidence using interactive services may actually leave patients in worse health.

The team, led by Dr Elizabeth Murray, reviewed 28 trials involving more than 4000 participants to measure the effectiveness of Interactive Health Communication Applications (IHCAs).

These communication applications were defined as computer-based information sources combined with other services, like online support groups, chatrooms or advice. The researchers found the IHCAs had a positive effect on people gaining information and feelings of support.

But they concluded the applications had no effect on making patients believe changing their behaviour for the better was possible or on resulting in behaviour change.

They also said they had a "strikingly negative effect" on health outcomes, leaving some in worse health.

Dr Murray said one reason for patients' worse health was that when they learn of small but important statistical effects of their treatment they become less frightened.

This would leave them less motivated to change the way they behave than if a doctor bluntly told a diabetic to control their sugar level or face death, for example.

Dr Murray also said that "knowledge-seekers" might become "so steeped in information" from the internet that they make their own decisions.

Tuesday, 28th June 2005

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## Internet-based health information may be hazardous: study

Last Updated Mon, 18 Oct 2004 14:55:28 EDT  
CBC News

LONDON - People with chronic diseases ought to pay more attention to what their doctor tells them rather than relying on advice from the internet, according to a new study.

Researchers at University College London reviewed clinical trials that measured the effectiveness of computer-based tools called Interactive Health Communication Applications.

The tools are usually web-based health packages that combine information with an online support group or chat room.



*The web may help patients to find social supports but they may not fair as well.*

Cyber-medicine improved medical knowledge among people with chronic conditions such as diabetes or asthma, the team found.

But there was no evidence patients changed their behaviour for the better, and some were left in worse health, the researchers found.

One reason for the paradox is patients may be lulled into a false of security online and therefore they're less motivated to act to improve their health.

Or users may rely on the internet information although it contradicts their doctor's advice. For example, a diabetic may decide the long-term risks of not lowering her blood sugar are worth the short-term gains.

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## Health

# Web Not Always Safe Health Source for Some

-- Robert Preidt

THURSDAY, Oct. 21 (HealthDayNews) -- Internet-based health information may be hazardous to people with chronic diseases such as diabetes or asthma, say University College London researchers.

They reviewed 28 studies on health information from the Web and found that using interactive computer tools does help people improve their medical knowledge and provides them with positive feelings of social support.

But the study found no evidence that Web health information helps people with chronic diseases make behavior changes that will benefit them. In fact, people who use computers to access information about their disease often end up in worse condition than if they had listened to their doctor.

"This whole finding confounds conventional wisdom," study author Dr. Elizabeth Murray, of the department of primary care and population sciences, said in a prepared statement.

She said patients who access a lot of Web-based health information may decide to make their own treatment choices, even if those decisions are contrary to a doctor's advice.

For example, a person with diabetes may be told by a doctor to lower blood sugar. But, based on his or her own interpretation of data from the Internet, the patient may decide the short-term tradeoffs of not

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### Warning on internet health advice

Publish Date : 10/18/2004 12:17:00 PM Source : Health News Onlypunjab.com

People with chronic disease should think twice before relying on the internet for health advice, research suggests.

A University College London study found many would be in a better condition if they had simply listened to their doctor's advice.

The study found interactive computer tools do improve medical knowledge.

But there was no evidence they change behaviour positively, and some that they left people in worse health.

The UCL team reviewed the effect of interactive web tools - known technically as Interactive Health Communication Applications (IHCAs) - on people with long-term conditions such as diabetes and

asthma.

In total they looked at 28 studies covering 4,042 participants.

Lead researcher Dr Elizabeth Murray said she was surprised that the tools seemed to boost medical knowledge, but, if anything, have a negative effect on the users' health.

Paradox



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Monday 27th June, 2005

## Study: Internet medical advice risky

Big News Network.com Monday 18th October, 2004 (UPI)

Those who use the Internet to research their own chronic diseases often wind up in worse condition than if they had heeded a doctor's advice.

A review of 28 randomized controlled trials involving 4,042 participants by lead author Dr. Elizabeth Murray of the University College Medical School in London found using computer tools does improve the medical knowledge of people with diabetes, asthma or other chronic conditions. It also provides them with positive feelings of social support, but there was no evidence cyber-medicine help people change their behavior.

The study suggested because knowledge-seekers become so steeped in information from the Internet, they make treatment choices on their own, contradicting advice from their doctors. For instance, a diabetic person might be told by a doctor to lower blood sugar but decide, based on his own interpretation of data, that the short-term tradeoffs of not complying are worth the long-term risks.

We found that people who use these things (Internet sources) had more sugar in their blood than those who didn't, Murray said.

The review appears in the October issue of the Cochrane Collaboration, an international organization that evaluates medical research.

# News in science

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## Logging on can make you sicker

Judy Skatsooon  
ABC Science Online

Wednesday, 20 October 2004

Using the internet to manage a chronic illness can leave you in worse health than before you logged on, a review of recent studies has found.

The University College London (UCL) review of the effect of computer and web-based health programs is published in the latest issue of the [Cochrane](#) reviews.

The review looked at children and adults with a range of chronic conditions including diabetes, arthritis, eating disorders, asthma, cancer and Alzheimer's disease.

After looking at 28 trials involving more than 4000 patients, it found that using the internet improved knowledge and gave patients a sense of social support.

But web-based programs had no effect on behaviour and didn't encourage people to change their lifestyle. They also had a negative effect on long-term health.

"Consumers who wish to increase their knowledge or social support amongst people with a similar problem may find [using the internet] helpful," the review said.

"However, consumers whose primary aim is to achieve optimal clinical outcomes should not use [it]."

### Should we abandon the net?

Australian researcher Professor Richard Wootton, director of research at the Centre for Online Health at the University of Queensland, said people shouldn't rush to the conclusion that turning to the internet in response to illness was a health hazard.

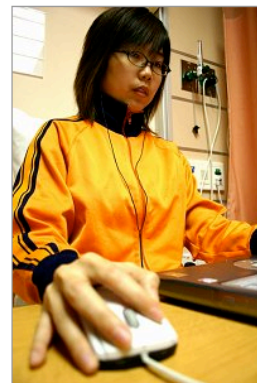
He said researchers in Queensland and Canberra had shown the internet was valuable in delivering cognitive behaviour therapy for conditions like non-clinical depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder, areas excluded from the Cochrane review.

"I think it's a very interesting finding in a new and potentially important field but it's hard to interpret what it means at this rather early stage of the game," he said.

"It may be that when you get larger studies and more of them this [negative effect] may disappear."

Lead researcher Dr Elizabeth Murray of UCL described the finding as "unexpected and provocative".

Murray said more research was needed to establish whether the negative health outcomes were because patients became over-assured, thereby losing the motivation to change bad habits, or made a decision to prioritise short-



Using the internet to research your medical condition may backfire, a new review suggests (Image: iStockphoto)

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**Patient, don't try to heal thyself**

19/10/2004 **by John Tilak**

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Looking to the internet for medical help could cause more harm than good, according to a University College London study.

Ironically it is the very role that interactive tools play in enhancing medical knowledge that is the problem.

The study notes that this increase in knowledge could be bad for users by making them more complacent. The availability of information could also prompt them to make their own decisions for their treatment instead of complying with a doctor's prescription.

The review appears in the October issue of the Cochrane Collaboration, an international organisation that evaluates medical research.

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## Knowledge May be Hazardous to Web Consumers' Health

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People who use their computers to find information about their chronic disease often wind up in worse condition than if they had listened to their doctor, according to a new review of studies on Internet health.

Newswise — People who use their computers to find information about their chronic disease often wind up in worse condition than if they had listened to their doctor, according to a new review of studies on Internet health.

Using interactive computer tools does improve the medical knowledge of people with diabetes, asthma or other chronic conditions, and does provide them with positive feelings of social support, according to researchers reviewing 28 randomized controlled trials involving 4,042 participants. But there was no evidence that cyber-medicine help people change their behavior and startling evidence that it may leave them in worse health.

"This whole finding confounds conventional wisdom," says lead author Elizabeth Murray, M.D., Ph.D., of the University College Medical School in London. The authors looked at studies that measured the effectiveness of "Interactive Health Communication Applications" on people's information gain, feelings of social support, "self-efficacy," behavior change and overall clinical outcomes.

IHCAs had a positive effect on people's information gain and feelings of social support; no effect on "self-efficacy" (the belief that behavior change is possible) or on actual behavior change; and a strikingly negative effect on outcomes.

Murray said there are two possible reasons for the paradox between active knowledge-seekers and their seemingly worsening health.

One reason may be that when they learn of small, but important, statistical effects of a treatment they become less frightened and thus unmotivated to change the way they might if a doctor bluntly told a person with diabetes to control her sugar or face death. "But actually," Murray explains, "if you become more knowledgeable you realize it's all rather a long way off. They are less frightened and that reduces their motivation to be really strict in their control."

A second reason might be because knowledge-seekers become so steeped in information from the Internet they make treatment choices on their own, contradicting advice from their doctors. For instance, a diabetic person might be told by a doctor to lower blood sugar but decide, based on his own interpretation of data, that the short-term tradeoffs of not complying are worth the long-term risks.

"We found that people who use these things (IHCAs) had more sugar in their blood than those who didn't," Murray said.

The researchers cannot explain the finding that the interventions had no effect on behavior change but nevertheless resulted in worse outcomes. Murray and her team conclude that more research is needed to fully understand the negative effect of interactive health applications on clinical outcomes and whether some computer health programs can be designed to improve them.

The review appears in the October issue of the *Cochrane Collaboration*, an international organization that evaluates medical research. Systematic reviews draw evidence-based conclusions about medical practice after considering both the content and quality of existing medical trials on a topic.

In this review, the definition of an "interactive health communication application" was a computer-based information source combined with one or more additional services, such as an on-line support group, chat room or tailored advice based on data provided by the user. Murray says, however, that some researchers "worry that the friends you make on computer are not right sort of friends. won't be there for you and

Interactive Health Communication Applications for people with chronic disease - Microsoft Internet Explorer

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