
CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Internet-based provider-patient communication in Ghana: recent findings

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Introduction:

While most people in the West have had easy access to the Internet for some time [1], with the dissemination of smart phones with Internet access this is now also rapidly becoming the case in West Africa [2]. Until recently, provider-patient communication has typically taken the form of face-to-face interactions or telephone calls [3]. In Africa, the Internet and especially the social media are now gathering importance as platforms for provider-patient communication and sources of health information [4].

Methods:

We describe findings from two recent studies on use of the Internet for health purposes carried out in Accra, the capital of Ghana. In one study, we gathered data from 363 students at the First University [5]. In another study, we obtained data from 95 health workers at a 400-bed teaching hospital.

Results and discussion:

44.4% of the students used social media and email to communicate with health workers [5]. 72.6% of the health workers used smartphones to communicate with their patients, and 26.3% used various apps including social media to interact with patients. This could suggest that using the Internet for provider-patient interaction has become more common in Ghana than it is in the West [6], but more research is needed to confirm and explain this hypothesis.

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