Are GPs Ready for Informatization of their GP Offices?

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Medical informatics (MI) is a part of everyday life and work in health care and so it is very important for every physician to be well-informed and have a good knowledge in that field. Especially it is necessary for GPs, who have more direct contact with both the patients and all other participants in health care.

The aim of this paper is to see if GPs are more familiar with MI than physicians from other medical specializations. Our opinion is that journals (medical and MI), congress proceedings and web sites are the best sources for very fresh and up-to-date information. This study includes physicians of different specializations during their postgraduate studies. As a part of their MI exam, they are obliged to find a paper on IT and/or MI in medicine and health care, to read and comment it, and relate it to their workplace and surroundings and their information needs as well as their knowledge and skills in IT.

Our sample consists of 90 students, 49 specializing in Family Medicine (in Croatia the specialization for GP is named Family Medicine /Fammed/) and 41 the other specializations /Others/. The analysis includes the titles of papers and students’ comments written in free text format. The standardised open-ended interview was chosen because of its richness in various information. The answers were not coded but slightly modified as not to lose useful data and certain vocabulary characteristics on the whole and/or in the vocabulary of certain groups. Software SPAD was used for the statistical analysis because of its greatest advantage: the possibility to combine in statistical procedures the examinees’ free text with their other data.

Of total of 90 students, 32 of them read papers in journals and portals in Croatian language, all others in foreign languages – English and German. Many of them read Medix, a Croatian journal very popular among physicians (21.1%). Some of the apparent reasons are that it is published in Croatian and there was an issue on computerization in health care in Croatia. This attracted the attention of Fammed students in particular. The majority of Others opted for more specialized journals, either in MI or in the field of their specialization. The students were quite generous in commenting the paper and comparing it to their workplace and surroundings, their information needs as well as their knowledge and skills in IT. Both groups used similar quantity of words on the whole as well as different words in their comments. We found that the most frequent words and repeated segments are those of no substantial relevance for the topic or the content of the paper, i.e. their assignment.

No relevant difference between students of Fammed and Others appears from statistical analysis. So we can conclude that Fammed students are not more or better prepared for informatization of their GP offices than the students of Others in whose offices informatization is to start in the near future. There is still much to be done in further and additional education of physicians in all specializations in the field of MI. The greatest effort should be done by themselves as a part of their self education.