Reviewer’s report

Title: Professional Use of the Internet among Dermatologists: A Cross-Sectional Survey

Version: 1 Date: 7 August 2009

Reviewer: Göran Petersson

Reviewer’s report:

The authors describe the use of internet among dermatologists in Saudi-Arabia and claims that more training is needed to take advantage of the internet. The paper is interesting and this kind of study is important in order to encourage colleagues to use the internet and to identify areas for training.

The objective of the study is well defined. The data are essentially adequately captured and described.

- Major Compulsory Revisions
  1. The questionnaire distributed to the dermatologists gave a high response rate. However, the reader should be helped by enclosing the questionnaire. Were there no open questions? If you used open questions, what were the results?
  2. If there were no open questions, what bias might the fixed questions imply?
  3. How was the questions validated? Did the participants get any incentives to answer?
  4. The participants should be described more. What computer environment did they have? Nothing is stated about digitalization of health records. Did the participants use electronic health records? Would that influence the results?
  5. How representative were the participants for all the dermatologists in Saudi Arabia, eg. which relation of males/females is it in the whole population of dermatologists?

Were there any reason to believe that those attending the conference were more prone for professional development and innovation? Could that explain some of the positive results?

6. The authors should be more careful when reporting differences of their data. In this kind of scientific paper, a difference between data is existing when a statistical difference is proven. The authors should omit the statements of differences of absolute values regarding eg. gender, residents vs. specialist and consultants etcetera since there were no statistical difference.

7. The authors discuss very thoroughly their findings. However, since the authors bring up the differences that were not significant, the statements are too strong. Furthermore, the results are compared with a European study published year 2002 (data from 2001). More reflection of possible reasons to the posed differences is warranted.
8. In the Abstract Conclusion
"…which will lead to” should be replaced by "which probably (or is expected to) will” since there is no evidence of this conclusion. The Conclusion at the end of the paper should correspond to that in the Abstract.

9. Abstract: Describe the number and gender of the participants in relation to all dermatologists, ie. the 160 out of the 520.

10. The authors state that training of searching eg PubMed is important, which sounds good. However, could the authors suggest other parts to train? Who should be responsible for the training? The authors mention different sources for knowledge retrieval. However, I miss the informal sources in dermatology within so called community of practice, eg. Vance K, Howe W, Dellavalle RP. Social internet sites as a source of public health information. Dermatol Clin. 2009 Apr;27(2):133-6, vi. Review.

- Minor Essential Revisions
11. Ref 3. Year?

12. In Tables 1-4 the text should state eg. ”a cohort of dermatologists (n=107) in Saudi Arabia” since not all dermatologists were studied.

In Table 4. count=n

13. Figures 1-2 are redundant and the results should be expressed in the text, eg in parenthesis.

- Discretionary Revisions
14. Since CPD (continuous profesional development) is gradually replacing CME, CPD should be used instead of CME.

15. In the introduction, several areas for internet use within dermatology is referred. However, since teledermatology is common it would have been appropriate to refer also to that. Regarding Primary care physicians’ experiences of carrying out consultations on the internet, the following reference can be recommended. Umefjord G et al. Inform Prim Care. 2004;12(2):85-90.


Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.

Göran Petersson