

Navigating the maze of online health information: the experiences of people with chronic health conditions

Joanne Mayoh: Bournemouth University

In recent years, the UK has seen a dramatic increase in people seeking health information via the internet, and the development of a range of health related websites and online information tools that promise to improve the future of healthcare. According to recent UK health policy, the increased availability of health information via the internet will lead to the emergence of 'Expert patients' and a health system based around patient-led care. The suggestion made by the Department of Health, is that engaging patients in their healthcare decisions, by adopting more of a partnership relationship between patient and care giver, would result in joint decisions, and greater sense of agency and empowerment for patients. This belief is not without its problems. High volumes of unregulated electronic information mean it is often hard to source, and is often of poor quality. In addition, a shift in the information power balance between patient and practitioner has faced hostility.

This presentation will report on the progress of current PhD research looking into how people are using online health information, and operating as information enabled consumers. This has so far been achieved by adopting a mixed methods questionnaire in order to gain a breadth of knowledge of the area. This project is currently in the stage one data analysis stage. Once this data has been analysed, the findings will be utilised in order to conduct a phenomenological depth study into interesting phenomena arising in stage one and therefore developing a deeper understanding of the meaning of information seeking, and a description of the overall experience. The overall aim of this study is to

achieve a greater understanding of the experiences of people with chronic illness information seeking. The broad description of how people operate can be used to not only inform the questioning in stage two, but will also help give a more detailed description of the overall experiences by outlining how people operate. A further objective of the research is to be able to make practical use of the findings in stage one and two by making recommendations about what should be included in healthcare professionals' education as a result.