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eHealth Consumer Attitudes in Greece and Denmark

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Abstract

This study examines the attitudes of people in Greece and Denmark towards innovative eHealth services. Although Internet use in general and more specifically Internet use for Health and Illness (H&I) is higher in Denmark than in Greece, survey data shows that people are equally interested in accessing their Electronic Health Record (EHR) online. Different attitudes between Greeks and Danes in regards to telemedicine and second opinion could be attributed to different levels of Internet maturity.

Keywords:

telemedicine, eHealth consumer trends, medical records, public acceptance of health care, public opinion

Methodology

An eHealth Consumer Trends Survey that investigates perceptions and attitudes towards use of the Internet for H&I began in 2005 and will be repeated in 2007 in order to establish eHealth consumer trends across Europe. The participating countries are Norway, Latvia, Germany, Denmark, Portugal, Greece and Poland. In telephone interviews conducted in October 2005, 1000 men and women from each country between ages 15-80 expressed their opinion on the use of the Internet for H&I. The sample was stratified for age, occupation, and residence. The questionnaire, based on earlier Norwegian surveys (2000-2002), was translated into national languages using the dual focus method. Additional questions, designed specifically for Greece and Denmark, explore the acceptance of innovative eHealth services: telemedicine, remote medical visits, teleradiology, and online access to one's personal EHR. Willingness to pay for eHealth was also considered in Greece.

Results

The attitudes towards telemedicine and second opinion in Greece and Demark differ considerably. 41% of the Danish respondents reacted positively to the idea of telemedicine in comparison to a mere 25% of the Greek respondents. 70% of the Greek respondents favourable to telemedicine, were willing to pay 10 euros for a remote medical visit by computer or video phone. When asked if they would be willing to grant remote access to their medical data in order to expedite diagnosis, more than half of the Greek respondents were hesitant, with just 44% willing to grant access to their test results. When the Danish respondents were asked a similar question, 73% pointed out that they would agree to have their xrays sent abroad for analysis by foreign doctors if this action meant they would receive a faster and more precise diagnosis and treatment. These attitudes can be explained by the different levels of Internet use (42,2% in Greece vs. 80,1% in Denmark) and of Internet use for H&I (22,9% in Greece vs. 60% in Denmark). According to the results of the survey, access to one's EHR appears to be the most attractive online service related to H&I. When asked if they would go online to access their EHR assuming they were given the opportunity, 61.7% of the Greek respondents were affirmative. It is worth noting that one third of all respondents in Greece are even willing to pay for such a service. Similar conclusions are drawn from observing the corresponding results of the Danish survey with 58% of the respondents interested in the EHR service. It is clear that there is a positive attitude among citizens in Greece and Denmark towards accessing their EHR online. Despite the positive perception of the Greek respondents, such services are not yet widely available in Greece. In Denmark, the Danish eHealth Portal was launched in 2003 to serve as a gateway to the public healthcare sector for patients and health professionals. Cooperation between health professionals across institutional borders is facilitated whereas patients have the ability to interact with health professionals as well as access phone numbers, waiting lists, and their own EHR data. 53.2% of Danish respondents were not aware of the portal's existence, thus suggesting that the campaign has not yet had the intended effect and more efforts towards raising awareness are required.

Conclusions

The presented results reflect the growing trend to use the Internet as a source of information on H&I, as a means to interact with health professionals to expedite diagnosis or to access one's own personal EHR. Different levels of Internet use and Internet use for H&I explain the different attitudes towards eHealth services in Greece and Denmark. People are inclined to access their EHR, but reluctant towards telemedicine and second opinion, perhaps due to their lack of experience with eHealth. The progress already made towards eHealth addressing current and future needs is a sign that the innovative ideas are being applied and in time accepted.