

Google Bhai MD! Internet as a Diagnostician

FOR PHYSICIANS

In fewer than 10 years of common use, the web has already had a considerable impact on clinical medicine. Google is the most popular search engine on the web, with access to more than three billion medical articles – and searching for health information is one of the most common uses of the web. While doctors carry a huge amount of medical information in their hearts, they may need to seek further help if they come up against an unusual case.

Physicians are fast making up the use of newer medical search engines like Google-Scholar (<http://scholar.google.com/>) and Pubmed (www.pubmed.gov). The current version of Google Scholar focuses on Internet sites that contain information that is critically appraised, such as the peer-reviewed journal literature, or that are produced by reputable sources, such as universities(1).

A team of Australian doctors *googled* the symptoms of 26 cases for a study in the New England Journal of Medicine. In 15 cases, the web search came up with the right diagnosis. Web based search engines such as Google and Google-Scholar are becoming the latest tools in clinical medicine, and doctors in training need to become proficient in their use(2).

FOR PATIENTS

Internet is being increasingly used by patients for finding their diagnosis, gathering more information about their illness. Patients may find alternative medical treatments on internet. Chatrooms and online discussion forums from other internet users who have the same disease are quite common. Self medication and self diagnosis on the basis of web is to be avoided. An expert physician should always be consulted before going for such self-medication.

FINDING A DIAGNOSIS ON MEDICINE 2.0

The current state of the art in medicine 2.0 of today is the automated online CDSS (Clinical Decision Support Systems). A doctor in a physician in rural clinic could upload medical data, such as lab tests, patients personal information and examination findings. These medical data are queried the CDSS from a central server and a set of differential diagnosis is delivered to the doctor. Various CDSS softwares are available online.

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REFERENCES

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2. Tang H, Kwoon Ng JH. Googling for a diagnosis-use of Google as a diagnostic aid: Internet based study. BMJ 2006; 333: 1143-1145.