

Improving the digital health literacy of diabetic patients

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Background:

The wide availability of web-based health information creates opportunities for citizens to be better informed and to play a more active role in self-managing their health. However, to benefit from this opportunity, one must have the competence to access, understand, evaluate and apply health information from the internet. People with low digital health literacy (DHL) may retrieve inaccurate, misleading, or incomplete information that can be detrimental to their health. To counter this, the EU-funded IC-Health project developed a series of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) to help improve the DHL of Europeans.

Methods:

As part of this project, MOOCs were developed to increase the DHL of diabetic patients. Five sets of MOOCs were developed in a co-creation approach involving diabetic patients and health professionals in Spain, Sweden, Denmark, Italy and Belgium through meetings and interactions on an online forum. The MOOCs were tested in patient groups and fine-tuned based on their comments and suggestions to maximize their cultural fit and usability.

Results:

The resulting MOOCs developed in each of the five countries differ in content and presentation, but use the same four course structure representing the four dimensions of DHL (accessing, understanding, appraising and applying internet-based health information). For each course, guidance and examples are provided on how to find health information online, how to use search engines, and how to assess the reliability of websites. The final versions of the MOOCs were tested in a large sample of diabetic patients via a questionnaire assessing DHL before and after taking the course, assessing if course participation enhances the DHL among the users.

Conclusions:

By creating a series of MOOCs focusing on DHL for diabetic patients, the IC-Health project helps to strengthen their competences to access, understand and use accurate and reliable information to make well-informed health decisions.