

Poster presentation

Internet and the psychiatric patient: our experience

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Background

The provision of medical advice in psychiatric patients, using the advanced services of the internet.

Material and Methods

This is a retrospective, population based study in 261 psychiatric patients from a random sample of 1500 patients that visited our medical site, seeking medical advice using the electronic mail, teleconference or IRC private channels. A team consisting of two general practitioners, two psychiatrists, a neurologist and an internist, was held responsible for the processing of the requests. The following medical data were considered as absolute minimum for the completion of the service: age of the patient, location, marital status, medical and family history, present and past complaints. In case of important data were missing, our team would contact the patient for further information.

Results

198 of the 261 requests were processed. In the remaining requests, either certain important data were missing, or the clinical or imaging examination were absolutely necessary. 47.5% (n = 94) of the patients were seeking advice for close relatives and 72.7% (n = 144) were between 20 and 45 years old. 12.6% (n = 25) of requests were on substance-related disorders and 14.1% (n = 28) were related to schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders. Another 19.7% (n = 32) were classified as suffering from mood disorders, whereas 20.2% (n = 40) of cases belonged to anxiety disorders. The remainder 36.9% (n = 73) included among others psychosomatic, eating, somatoform, sleep and personality disorders. After processing the requests, 40.9% (n = 81) of the patients replied by expressing their

satisfaction, while 48.5% (n = 96) of patients stated that our service was essential in understanding their problem.

Discussion

Internet and modern technologies provide a reliable, alternative solution in the provision of medical advice, adjuvant to the conventional medical services.