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Forum Clinic

Forumclinic is a set of audiovisual material (DVDs and Website) in both Spanish and Catalan launched in January 2007. Its purpose: improving the quality of life of chronically ill patients. Based on the premise that by having a better understanding of their disease patients can become more autonomous, the project aims to encourage patient involvement in the clinical decision making process hand in hand with the healthcare team.

Health requirements and the demand for services have seen substantial changes in recent years. Increased life expectancy has resulted in a greater prevalence of chronic pathologies. The WHO has classified this situation as priority even in developing countries. Current models of patient care need to be revised, with a greater emphasis on patients taking a more active role in diagnostic and therapeutic processes. Patients will need to make substantial changes to their life style, but these behavioural changes can only be achieved when the patient has the necessary information, acquires new skills and adopts a more positive attitude to the problem.

Today we are faced with a growing need for more health information from the population in general whilst witnessing an expanding capacity of accessibility to information thanks to new forms of communication and information technologies. This massive expansion has resulted in a proliferation of content that at times can be of dubious quality, which is not in the patient's best interest.

Determining the Forum Content

Content had to be selected and prioritised. This was achieved using the following criteria:

The degree of prevalence of the illness;

The existence and size of an existing network of patients that can guarantee the spread and impact of new and Customised material;

Degree of relevance and current interest of the material produced, both for specialists in the field and affected patients as well as originality of the material;

Quality and experience of the specialist medical team that will prepare the material;

How chronic the disease is;

Level of interest in the chosen subject by health administration bodies, and

Effectiveness of therapeutic education in improving patient's quality of life.

Following this criteria, we completed monographs on ischemic cardiopathy, diabetes, chronic obstructive lung illness, schizophrenia, breast cancer, depression and factors of cardiovascular risk. Arthritis and arthrosis, obesity and bipolarity are also in production.

Authors are professionals from hospitals, clinics and associated health centres. The project has been financed by the Fundación BBVA, a non-profit organisation. Information combines the best scientific evidence available, professionals' experience and individual patients' perspectives. It is available in DVD format and can also be accessed via a web site ([http:// www.forumclinic.org](http://www.forumclinic.org)) containing information as well as videos.

The Portal

The portal (www.forumclinic.org) combines content of general interest in text and multimedia format. The blog provides direct twoway interaction with the public.

Each illness section includes four distinct types of information:

- Text that summarises basic data on each illness;

- Recent news items related to the illness;
- Videos and 3D animations that explain biological mechanisms, among other aspects, and
- Professionally moderated discussion forums that form virtual communities. Forums facilitate dynamic group interaction between professionals and patients via direct intervention, via moderation following topics raised by patients, and via the 'suggest a topic' suggestion box.

Quality Criteria

We are enrolled as members and have received the seal of approval of the Health On the Net Foundation (<http://www.hon.ch>), and have been recognised by the Barcelona Institute of Doctors official web site. These accreditations require adherence to the following standards:

Transparency and honesty (site provider, aim and objective of the site, site's source of financing);

Authority: sources of all information provided as well as dates of publication;

Privacy and data protection;

Updated status of information;

Responsibility, and

Accessibility.

Some Statistics

Even without promotion, the audience of the website has grown. Currently we receive an average of more than 2,000 different visitors every day, half of whom are from South America (breast cancer is the most visited site). The forums represent around 24% of web visits.

Forum visitors have a participation rate ranging from 1.15% to 5.5%. 195,000 DVDs have been distributed through Spanish Health Centres and patient associations.

Conclusion

The growth rate of visits to the website, as well as posts to the forums together with the high degree of penetration that the DVD has achieved confirm the appropriateness of the material.

forumclinic has proved to be a useful electronic tool for bidirectional communication between healthcare professionals and patients, as well as for disseminating scientific knowledge to the public in general, dealing with both scientific findings and the emotional aspects of health care.

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