User Feedback in the Development of an On-Line Communication Tool for Patients and Providers

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This poster describes the methods that will be used to develop a Web-based tool to augment the provider-patient relationship through extensive end-user feedback. An existing resource in the Massachusetts General Hospital epilepsy service will be modified through focus groups with patients or providers and by recording the user interaction with the web-resource. Methods for the analysis of the data are proposed here. A plan to obtain feedback from any users who discontinue use of the system will also be presented.

There is increasing interest in using the Internet to foster communication between patient and provider. The majority of patients would like to use the Internet to communicate with their health care provider (1). In response, several organizations providing care have built systems to foster communication and provide health-related information.

The Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) Epilepsy service has operated such a resource for three years. Patients enrolled in the system are able to exchange confidential messages with their specialist provider via a web interface, browse a library of epilepsy-related information and communicate anonymously with other patients if they wish. Our aim is to utilize the patients' input thus optimizing the resource to better meet his or her needs.

Our approach to its development is organic. We plow in feedback, ideas and suggestions from the end users (patients) to propagate and improve the entire system. Methods used to develop content, organization and identify user difficulties are focus groups and user feedback. Usability is further studied in detail by analyzing video footage of computer-user interaction. (2)

There are a small number of epilepsy patients currently enrolled in the project. Some are active users. The first focus group comprises of several of the current active users. Feedback obtained is concerned with features they would like to see changed, suggestions for simplifying user interface and difficulties experienced using the system. This feedback will be incorporated into the resource.

The second focus group will comprise a heterogeneous group of patients drawn from the Epilepsy Service who are interested in using the system, but not necessarily those owning a computer or having used the Internet before. This group will not preview the system. However, they will be asked what services and features they would like to see on the resource, should they have access to their specialist provider and epilepsy information on-line.

Their feedback and comments will be incorporated, and new users will then begin to use the system. Registered users not continuing to use the resource will be followed up to elucidate their reasons. This will also form a useful part of the feedback process.

In addition to this verbal feedback, the users will also be observed interacting freely with the system as follows. In the final two months of the study, a miniature video camera will be placed at the patients' habitual place of login. The user will asked to verbalize their thoughts as they interact with the system or comment on specific aspects as they arise during the interaction.

The recorded interactions will then be analyzed to pinpoint any user difficulties encountered. Also noted will be any behavior associated with the repeated access of certain features.

We hope to provide insight on what patients want and value in this type of system. Such information may be of value to future designers of similar resources.