

Media release
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Young doctors sending patients to cyberspace

The next generation of doctors will ensure 'internet prescriptions' overhaul face to face consultations, according to leading medical specialist Dr Joe Kosterich.

A Gold Coast study published in the Medical Journal of Australia has produced statistics to indicate that the Internet is already changing the traditional doctor-patient relationship, with 55% of GP's aged 41-50 years old prescribing health websites to educate their patients about particular conditions or diseases. This is compared to 31% of GP's aged 51-60 years adopting the practice. The majority of GPs (69%) reported that they most often recommend websites to patients aged 26-45 years.

The results were supported by findings from the International Society for Research on Internet Interventions, which conducted successful trials on the effectiveness of internet programs for a number of health problems including depression, eating disorders and body image dissatisfaction.

"These are significant findings but they are the tip of the iceberg when you factor in the next generation of medical specialists coming through the system," said Dr Kosterich, Spokesperson for Australian medical website Virtual Medical Centre. Com.

"The gap found between the younger doctors and older GP's in terms of utilising the internet is pronounced, and this is still an age group that has adopted the internet rather than grown up with it. It is even still a significant figure for the latter, who would concede they are better served to direct patients to specific sites because they will do it regardless.

"But the medical students coming through the system now will almost exclusively adopt the practice, as will future students. It will be the norm with the majority of patients spending much more time finding out about a specific condition online than they will in face-to-face consultations. Nearly 70% of GP's acknowledged they directed 26- 45 year olds to online medical sites in this study which underlines the changing face of society. Medicine will reflect this like everything else."

Supporting his prediction is the Australian visitor traffic to Virtual Medical Centre.Com, which incorporates 19 separate free-of-charge 'Medical Centres' to address conditions including allergies, skin conditions, psychiatry and men, women and children's health. The site attracted 371,000 visitors in September alone.