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Doctors push websites but survey shows flaws

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RESEARCH has found more than half of Gold Coast GPs recommend websites to patients but not all doctors check their internet prescriptions are reliable.

Griffith University associate lecturer Dr Wayne Usher surveyed 108 Gold Coast GPs last year as part of his recently completed PhD research.

In one study the health scientist found about six out of 10 GPs recommended websites during consultations, most often to patients aged 26 to 45.

However, a second survey showed only 58 per cent of the 90 participating doctors personally checked more than 40 per cent of the websites they recommended, suggesting many sites were not being scrutinised.

Dr Usher also quizzed doctors on their understanding of the components that made a website reliable, such as accuracy, authority and objectivity, and found knowledge varied greatly.

"Doctors need to develop critical appraisal skills for themselves and their patients about what is a reliable source of information," he said.

"There are websites being recommended that really aren't being checked in terms of their reliability.

"The internet is changing the doctor-patient relationship and both GPs and health consumers need to be proactive in (developing) the ability to be able to evaluate health information."

Dr Usher said some GPs indicated they did not recommend websites because they feared they might not be reliable.

He also found doctors would be prepared to undergo continuing education to learn how to recognise credible internet sites and suggested this could also be introduced into medical school curriculums.

Gold Coast Division of General Practice president Michael Wright said GPs had to become a lot more cautious about ensuring web information they recommended was valid.

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