

## **Email in general practice: perturbing instrument or stimulus for the improvement of the service's quality in its clinic, psychorelational and organizational dimensions?**

*Valcanover F. (Trento), Tordi D. (Trento), Ortolani D. (Trento)*

### **Purpose**

Growing use of computer technologies in GP has gone also with the use of emails in the patient-physician communication. This phenomenon, which is widespread in USA and in some non-European countries, is growing quickly also in Europe, even if there are not yet shared guidelines for its implementation. At the moment it is still sporadic and restricted in Italy. The analysis of the emails returned in a semester in an urban Practice had some results which allow to reflect about aims, limits and capability of the use of this complex instrument in the setting of GP.

### **Methods**

It carried out a qualitative and quantitative analysis of all emails received between January and June 2008 in a Practice of Trento (Italy), composed by 5 GPs, 2 secretaries, 1 nurse and a catchment area of about 6.000 patients (14 to 100 aged). It was done a report in order to stimulate organizational, clinical and relationships changes inside the practice.

### **Results**

In six months 1.440 emails arrived. More than 25% of these were sent by patients who didn't use personally the PC but only through third persons (usually relatives). Only 35.21% contained requests which could be carried out exclusively by a physician, while 11.18% contained several types of requests. The 15.69% contained new clinical information.

### **Conclusions**

The considerable flow of emails shows that the service is much appreciated by the patients. It comes to light unusual critical situations in the patient-physician relationship, and organizational problems which need appropriate action-research projects in order to improve the service. It is desirable to lead further studies about perturbing effects of the Information Technology on the patient-physician relationship and also on the care and service's qualities.