

Use of Social Media can Improve Access to Cancer Care

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After Awareness comes the Problem of Access

With cancer incidence rising fast, various awareness initiatives have been launched. Promotion of vaccination, non-smoking areas and early detection have been, however, not always succeeded in decreasing mortality. Hurdles in getting patients on treatment and complete complex regimens create a reality of sharp contrasts across populations. Distance and costs direct access to care and often reduce benefit from screening and prevention to close to zero.

How Can We Improve This? Is the Internet Our Solution to Better Global Care?

Cancer diagnosis comes as a severe shock. Anxious patients face waiting times in their diagnostic process seek for help on the Internet. Web-information is often confusing and not aligned with their specific diagnosis or local policies. For local care-providers, time is needed to reunite different cancer specialists together in order to come to a quality treatment advice. These waiting times increase patient anxiety and demand for second opinions. Often patients are addressed to one of the national institutes but for patients more consultations and exams significantly increase stress, time and costs. The concentration of care in large cities makes sense in concentration of resources, but in practise leads to poor compliance and high costs for the patients. Overall the information flow in the diagnostic and treatment pathway is confusing for patients with long waiting times due to complexity and long distances to regional multidisciplinary quality care.

We live in an area of new communication tools, to which our younger generation eagerly adapts with phones, tablets and social media. However, in the medical world, we adapt only very slowly and often too paranoiac. Fear for privacy issues becomes an argument protecting us from change and risk of disruption of our protected privileged income of (private) medicine.

Nevertheless, to be able to improve access to timely care for everyone, the market needs disruption. With on-line tools, we can bring quality care closer to people. We can bring expert opinions to local community hospitals and patients themselves. The experts can directly respond to clinical questions about staging, treatments, clinical trials and complications to community hospitals doctors and guide them in performing local community care. For patients our platform consists of a community, where peers can meet for information, group empowerment and support. Patients and family can connect by becoming a member and chat with people in the same situa-

tion, in their own language from home. They can connect to the expert panel asking for advice about their diagnosis, treatment and possible complications, as well as talk to case managers for coaching, financial advice and nutritional or psychosocial help. Special counselling can be provided to family and peers about prevention, screening and genetic testing.

We need such digital solutions for speeding up the integrated cancer care process, which can significantly improve compliance and reduce costs in stress, unnecessary exams, treatments and travels for second opinion worldwide.

Several initiatives have been introduced over the year 2016 in the Internet space, advocating second opinions for cancer patients. Most are in English, address the US and Indian market and are quite costly. Reason for us to reach out for help in creating a non-for-profit alternative that provides a complete community support system, rather than an opinion only. Moreover, we hope to keep costs low that also lower-income patients can benefit. To achieve a global impact, we need, however, a lot of help. Help in translation of information, distribution of care plans and creation of hubs, where evidence based guideline basic treatment can be provided. Therefore, I ask your participation as care providers, women and people that can provoke change. No, my only conflict of interest to declare is my strong wish to provide basic cancer care for everyone, no matter where.

Please visit www.CancerTALK.org