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Electronic patient information: a log file study of its use by citizens and health care providers in Finland

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Background and Aim: Electronic patient versions of guidelines are one way to improve health care practices. In Finland, the patient versions can be reached either by the citizens' health portal Terveyskirjasto or by the portal for health care providers Terveysportti. The Medical Society Duodecim produces both of these portals. The aim of this study was to document the use of patient information in the Duodecim databases from 2010 to 2014.

Methods: In the portal system of Duodecim, it is possible to survey the opened articles in each database. We studied the log files and compared which patient information articles were hit in the citizens' and professionals' portals and also which patient versions were printed out. Our outcome measure was the actual use of the systems by citizens and health care providers.

Results: There were 1147 patient information articles that could be accessed. The monthly searches in the open access citizens' health portal grew more than three fold during the observation period: from approximately 690,000 openings per month in January 2010 to 2.2 million hits on average per month in 2014 (in a country with 5.3 million inhabitants). In the health care providers closed database, the use of patient version was steady: approximately 100,000 patient versions were accessed monthly (in a country with 20,000 working age doctors) a fifth of which were printed out. In the citizens' portal, the most frequently opened articles dealt with sensitive issues (for example sexually transmitted diseases and haemorrhoids), while health care providers mostly accessed articles where self-management had a major role (gout, irritable bowel syndrome, anticoagulant medication etc).

Conclusions: The use of electronic patient versions has grown fast in the open access citizens' health portal in Finland. Health care providers also access and print patient versions, however, only a minority of professionals follow this practice.