Posters

The use of ‘pointing’ to indicate information sharing in general practice consultations

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Background

There is an increasing level of pressure on clinicians both to inform patients and to involve them in decision making about the management of their condition and treatments. Previous work on the role of information technology in general practice has shown that it has had a considerable impact on the doctor–patient relationship in general practice. However, it has also observed that there is little evidence of general practitioners (GPs) encouraging their patients to become involved in on-screen information when they use their computers during the consultation. In this research, observations have been made relating to how the patient becomes included in the information displayed on-screen. This research comes from a preliminary examination of filmed data taken of patient–GP consultations collected as part of PRODIGY research and development.4

Preliminary observations

Empirical observations of the filmed data indicate that patients become both passively and actively involved in the information found on-screen. Passive involvement in on-screen information occurs as a result of the position of the computer and screen, where the patient looks at the screen while the GP consults the computer. Alternatively, there are occasions where the patient is actively included in information displayed on-screen. An examination of the data suggests that these ‘invitations’ are realised by the GP explicitly channelling the patient’s attention to the computer screen by ‘pointing’ in three ways, such as:

• the GP makes utterances using deictic markers such as ‘what I would like to do is use the computer together with you’ and ‘now I’m going to put in angina here and see what information is available’
• the GP points physically to the information on-screen whilst talking to the patient
• the GP points virtually to information on-screen by manipulating the mouse icon.

On many occasions where pointing occurs, the patient appears to accept the invitation to look at the information offered on-screen. This is indicated by the patient shifting his or her gaze towards the computer or moving posture by leaning towards the screen.

This research aims to gain a deeper understanding of these ‘pointing’ phenomena in a general practice context. These phenomena may provide us with fresh insights into the doctor–patient interaction, as well as how patients become involved in decision making and information sharing in a consultation scenario.

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4PRODIGY is a computerised prescribing decision-support system for use in general practice and receives funding from the Department of Health.