AVAILABILITY OF HEALTH CARE SERVICE INFORMATION ON INTERNET: A STUDY OF VIJAYAPURA CITY

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An attempt is made in this paper to provide an overview of the availability of health care service information on the Internet based on a study of websites of health service providers. Health information is one of the most frequently sought on the Internet. Internet Information technologies herald a major change in the dissemination of health and medical information, with the promise of transferring knowledge from health professionals to the general public. Accessibility to online clinical and health information is essential for better health outcomes. There are currently several websites and search engines that provide health care service information. But qualitatively the information provided by them is not satisfactory. On the other hand its usage is also in question due to various factors. Furthermore, there is a need for practitioners in the Vijayapura city health sector to take an active position in providing timely and context-relevant information to the growing need for online health information. The study concludes that it is an opportunity for information professionals to take a lead position in regulating and ensuring the availability of health-related information, especially that related to local health services. Such efforts will also complement existing initiatives aimed at improving active participation of the Vijayapura city people in promoting and sustaining healthy practices.

Keywords: Health Care; Health Information; Internet; Vijayapura.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet provides rich and versatile platforms for diverse interactions and sharing of information [1]. Health information is one of the most frequently sought topics on the Internet. Millions of people are using the Internet to get health information. Thousands of Websites are offering health care service information. Some of these sites are reliable and up-to-date; many are not. An attempt is made in this paper to provide an overview of health care service information on Internet.

HEALTH INFORMATION AND INTERNET

Interest in the Internet as a communication tool for health-related information is growing rapidly [2]. The profile of online health consumers can be broadly defined as patients, patients' friends/relatives, and citizens in general [3]. Internet-based health information is accessed from a variety of sources, including websites run by organizations, homepages run by individuals, and online support groups where people actively exchange health information and blogs. Since more people using the Internet as a source of health information the issue of credibility and trust on websites becomes important [4]. Online health information can increase patients' knowledge, competence, and engagement related to health decision-making strategies.

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In the late 1990s researchers began to note that many people were using the Internet to seek health information, despite various problems with the quality of information. There is a premise that patients with access to their personal health information presented in a form they can understand will be able to interpret and learn from this information in a way that benefits them. Various social forums exist in which anyone can share conversations about health with their peers. Such forums are especially popular among patients who seek to have conversations with other patients with a similar medical concern. Those who participate in online communities which discuss health issues report getting relief about their health worries, perceiving more control over their health and medical condition, having more medical knowledge, and having more personal agency overall [5].

Health information can empower people to make health decisions and to talk to their physician, resulting in a more patient-centred interaction between patient and health professionals. Among currently available technologies only the Internet has the potential to deliver universal access to up-to-date health care information [6]. Accurate and up-to-date information is vital to maintain quality of health care. During the past decade, many health information resources have been developed and available online for use by health care professionals [7].

The Internet has been used by healthcare professionals to obtain and share large amounts of medical information and to monitor diseases. The knowledge of the Internet as an important health information resource for physicians have greatly improved during the past decade as a result of patterns of use and medical impact measures [8]. The Internet has brought about flexible communication between patients and doctors by empowering patients with information. It has also revolutionized the compilation, assessment and distribution of information relating to healthcare [9].

ONLINE SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Internet-based health information is accessed from a variety of sources, including:

- Websites run by organisations
- Homepages owned by individual doctors.

- Online support groups where people actively exchange health information; and
- Blogs authored by health advocates, caregivers or those pursuing self-help [10].

Health Profile of Vijayapura District

Vijayapura city, formerly known as Bijapur, is the district headquarters of Vijayapura District of Karnataka state. The city has a population of 326,360 as per 2011 census. Total literacy rate of the city is 73.42 (239631) which is less than the state literacy rate (75.36) and the literacy rate among men is 77.89 (128615) and among women it is 68.85 (111016) which is slightly higher than the state literacy rate (68.1) among women.

The city of Vijayapura is the major city in the vicinity of 100 km radius having advanced medical facilities. It has long history of providing medical facilities dating back to medieval period by 'Ayurvedic Vaid' and later during Adilshah's period by 'Unani Hakims'. The first allopathic dispensary was started in the year 1871. Over a period of 135 years the number of hospitals and the quantity of health services provided to the people in the city has a seen a remarkable growth. After independence the Government of Karnataka opened many hospitals. Similarly private hospitals, clinics, and multi-speciality hospitals have been established.

In Vijayapura district health care facilities and services are made available and accessible through CHCs, PHCs and taluk hospitals in rural and urban areas. The PPP mode has improved overall healthcare facilities and services in Vijayapura district [11].

Presently, the city has many prominent hospitals providing advanced health services. Besides this the city has many blood banks, ambulance services, pathological and diagnostic laboratories, health clubs, nursing homes, maternity homes, pharmaceutical vendors, health care instrument vendors and hundreds of medical shops. Every agency is committed to provide mandatory information to the community. Taluk-wise details of health centres are given in table 1.

Table 1: Taluk Wise details of Health Centers 2011-12

Taluks	Allopathic Hospitals	Indian System of Medicine Hospitals	Private Hospitals	Primary Health Centers	Community Health Centers
BasavanaBagewadi	2	-	1	14	1
Indi	4	-	5	14	2
Muddebhihal	3	-	2	9	3
Sindagi	2	-	5	9	3
Vijayapura	63	1	63	14	-
Total	**74**	**1**	**76**	**60**	**9**

AVAILABILITY OF HEALTH INFORMATION ON INTERNET

A great variety of information sources are now available and accessible online. These include search engines like Google, Yahoo, Alta Vista, Lycos, Mama, etc.; databases like MEDLINE/PubMed, Scopus, Web of Knowledge, EMBASE, African Index Medicus; portals, gateways, digital archives, libraries and institutional repositories. Recent, reliable, quality and up-to-date healthcare information are also available on websites of academic and health institutions, professional associations, government and non-government organizations. In addition, some government and not-for-profit organizations such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and Bioline International have digital archives, which provide free full-text articles. Medical dictionaries, encyclopedias, abstracts and indexes, bibliographies, atlases, videos and drug information sources are also available online [12].

An advanced Google search was made to know the availability of health care services information on the Internet. It is noticed that quantitatively the amount of information available on the Internet is more but qualitatively it is not satisfactory.

The city has three major hospitals Shri B M Patil Medical College Hospital & Research Centre; Al-Ameen Medical College and Government District Hospital. The Government hospital does not have its own hospital website and the remaining two have their websites as a part of their colleges. Shri B M Patil Medical College Hospital & Research Centre website provides information on health services, facilities, additional services and contact information. Al-Ameen Medical College Hospital's website provides information on their services, facilities and contact numbers. The information is available only in English language. Among the private hospitals only four hospitals - Sasnur Hospital (http://sasnurhospitals.com/), Dr. Bidari's Ashwini Hospital(http://www.ashwinihospital.org/), Kidney Foundation (http://drsbpatil.com/) and Ayush Hospital (http://glayushhospital.com/) have their own websites. Sasnur Hospital's website provides information on full spectrum of women's health care services, facilities, appointment, events, hospital timings, contact details. Dr. Bidari's Ashwini Hospital's website provides information on facilities, special services, corporate service-research and development, 24 x 7 enquiry, make an appointment, preventive health check, pharmacy open 24 x 7, ambulance facilities and contact details. Kidney Foundation's website includes information on specialisation and appointment information, etc. Ayush Hospital's website provides information on facilities, services, specialities, doctors' information and contact information.

Other prominent hospital information are available on Internet through local search engines like-
www.hospitalkhoj.com, http://www.justdial.com/, http://www.listbesthospitals.com/, http://www.vijapuraonline.in/, www.hospital.cybo.com, http://www.rainrays.com/, http://www.bijapur.nic.in/tele_index.html, http://maps.mapmyindia.com/, https://www.asklaila.com. Only bare minimum information like contact details, phone numbers of hospitals and location information, maps, views, votes, reviews and ratings are available. Very few hospitals have provision for appointment through Internet.

Only minimum information about individual doctors and consultants like dentists, gynaecologists, dermatologists, paediatricians, psychiatrist, and general physicians was available on Internet through the local search engines.

The other health care services include pathological and diagnostic laboratories, medical shops, medical instruments vendors, blood banks, fitness and health clubs, etc.

Some of the important ayurvedic hospitals in the city of Vijayapura offering traditional ayurvedic treatment methods are Nagur Hospital and Ayurvedic College, Government Ayurvedic Hospital, Agnivesh Ayurved Chikitsalaya, Ayurvedic Vidyalaya Hospital, etc. http://www.justdial.com/ a local search engine provides contact information. Another local search engine https://www.sehat.com provides a list of Ayurvedic hospitals with its profile, list of doctors and their phone numbers for appointments, but the links when accessed do not provide further results. It provides reviews, maps; https://www.chikitsa.com provides ask a doctor online facility. http://www.vijapuraonline.in/ and www.asklaila.com provides only contact information of Ayurvedic hospitals.

There are many hospitals in the heritage city of Vijayapura, specialized in advanced treatment of eye. These hospitals offer service of specialists in the field of care and treatment of eye problems. Some of the famous eye hospitals in the Vijayapura district are Kembavi Eye Hospital, Biradar Eyes Hospital, Anugraha Eye Hospital, etc. http://www.justdial.com/ include contact information, votes, maps and reviews.

Health clubs are active in the city of Vijayapura to provide proper training and guidance in health care and body fitness. Modern-day health clubs are playing a vital role in giving a boost to the weakening physical stamina. Most of the Fitness clubs offer a wide range of exercise equipments that takes care of both mental stress and health stability. There are many famous gymnasiums, fitness centers and weight loss centers in Vijayapura. Few of the popular fitness centers in Vijayapura are Diamond Gym, Dr Arun's fitness center, Healthline Enterprises, Health Line Fitness Club. Gymnasiums and fitness centers have become a part of life style. http://www.justdial.com/,

http://www.vijapuraonline.in/ includes contact information, maps and reviews. http://maps.mapmyindia.com/ provides map of the health clubs.

Yoga is a better way of living for those who aim to get a healthy mind in a healthy body, thus the ultimate aim of yoga is to help the individual to transcend the self and attain enlightenment. There are many Yoga Centers in Vijayapura which offer a wide variety of special courses on yoga and related topics. The details of yoga and meditation centers in Vijayapura i.e. Prajapita, Brahma Kumaris, Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalay. http://www.vijapuraonline.in, http://www.justdial.com/ provides a list of yoga centers with contact information.

We all know the importance of blood banks. Today most of the hospitals have blood banks attached to them to obtain blood quickly. Vijayapura district also has many blood banks associated with many hospitals and there is a branch of Indian Red Cross Society also providing their services in Vijayapura. The information of blood banks in Vijayapura are District Government Hospital, Dr. BNM Rural Ayurvedic Medical College, Lions blood bank, Dr. Karigoudars' blood bank, B. M. Patil Medical College, Hospital and Research Centre, Al Ameen Medical College Hospital. The blood banks in Vijayapura open for service 24 hours a day and 365 days a year. Official website of Vijayapura (http://www.bijapur.nic.in/) provides telephonic index on blood banks and www.justdail.com provides contact information of the blood banks.

Majority of the hospital information available through local search engines provide only contact information of the hospital. They don't have their own websites and those that have their own websites don't have Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).The health information is available only in English language which decreases its usability. Even with the high literacy rate in Vijayapura district it is found that the usability of available online information regarding hospitals and health care is not optimum. The public use different means to collect information but accessing the online information is their last option. The reason can be said to be lack of awareness and knowledge about these websites. There is a need to overcome this

drawback by creating awareness among public regarding online health care service information.

HEALTH CARE SERVICE INFORMATION

Health care is the maintenance or improvement of health via the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of disease, illness, injury and other physical and mental impairments in human beings. Health care is delivered by health professionals (providers or practitioners) in allied health professions, chiropractic, physician, associates, dentistry, midwifery, nursing, medicine, optometry, pharmacy, psychology, and other health professions. It covers the work done in providing primary, secondary, and tertiary care, including public health.

Through Internet information about list of hospitals and their addresses, a comprehensive list of Doctor's in Vijayapura and Booking Appointments is accessible. Using the Internet to find health and medical information can help to be informed and take right decisions about our health, although some health information available on the Internet can be valuable. Internet users search for health information online, with increased interest in areas such as diet, fitness, drugs, health insurance, experimental treatments, and particular doctors and hospitals , to gather more information about a medically diagnosed disease or illness, to find out alternative medical treatments and seek support from other Internet users having the same kind of medical disease or illness via 'chat rooms', online discussion forums, blogs or communities, or social media such as Facebook, etc.

INFORMATION ON VARIOUS HEALTH SCHEMES

The government district hospital provides preventive, promotive and curative services for all the people in Vijayapura. There are many special units in the district hospitals of Vijayapura. The Government district hospital does not have its own website, the facilities, services and details are hence not accessible to the public.

There are certain schemes run and supported by the state and central governments, such as ESI, Vajpayee Arogyasri, Arogya Bhagyayojane,

Yashasvini, Janani Suraksha, etc. Vajpayee Arogyasri is a unique health insurance scheme implemented by Government of Karnataka. The scheme provides financial assistance to urban poor families to meet their health needs. Serious diseases affecting heart, kidney, cancer, brain haemorrhage, burns and accident cases, etc., are covered under the scheme. Yashasvini scheme is open to all the members of the rural co-operative society. The Sthree Shakti scheme has been designed so that women belonging to BPL families can avail totally cashless treatment in private hospitals. Janani Suraksha scheme is the continuation of the previous delivery allowance scheme of the Central Government. The objective is to provide financial assistance to the poor pregnant women during delivery (Human Development Report, 2014). The Sukshema Project of the government is one of the health care projects in Vijayapura with a higher popularity among the people residing in the rural areas of Vijayapura. The information on these schemes available in various hospitals does not receive any mention on the websites even though these are State Government schemes, these schemes are not mentioned in the hospital websites.

CONCLUSION

The Internet access for health information is low. Compounding the situation is the poor delivery of health information services. Existing constraints to the Internet access might encourage quick check of health information without giving adequate attention to cross-checking or verifying the authenticity of the information from other sources. With the poor access and urge to quickly surf the Internet for health-related information, the chances are high that inadequate information may be sought. This shortcoming may strengthen further the practice of self-medication and delays in prompt health information seeking through formal sources. Furthermore, there is a need for practitioners in the Vijayapura city health sector to take an active position in providing timely and context-relevant information to the growing need for online health information. This also offers the sector an opportunity to take a lead position in regulating and ensuring the availability of health-related information, especially that which is related to local common health conditions. Such efforts will also complement existing initiatives aimed at improving

active participation of the Vijayapura city people in promoting and sustaining healthy practices [13].

There are currently several medical information websites that directly target the general population with the aim of providing information about health problems, self-care and prevention. However, this new technology also hides several shortcomings, such as: (i) uneven quality of medical information available on the Internet; (ii) difficulties in finding, understanding and using this information; (iii) lack of access for the unconnected population; and (iv) the potential for harm and risks of over consumption .To be able to overcome these dangers, it is important that public health practitioners and health professionals be involved in the design, dissemination and evaluation of Web-based health and medical information.

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