

Online Continuing Medical Education (CME) for German Physicians

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Abstract: The medical knowledge network www.evidence.de of Witten/Herdecke University has developed an internet platform for CME in cooperation with a software house. The user data are filed on a secured Open-Source server. A SQL database and a content management system facilitate the easy input of different MC question blocks. Each block refers to one of the knowledge network's clinical practice guidelines (CPGs) topics. Until June 2003 14 blocks of tasks were designed within the medical faculty and certified by the responsible medical association. Existing CPGs allow a swift development of questions concerning each medical indication. All questions were evaluated by an editorial group of physicians consisting of General Practitioners. A consecutive usability-test was positive. Suggestions offered by the users were implemented in an updated version. An online platform for CME can support active learning and may establish an additional stimulus to absorb knowledge relevant for medical practice.

Introduction

The available amount of information in medicine is increasing exponentially. Suitable strategies are necessary to separate the "wheat from the chaff" and impart knowledge relevant to specific situations to potential users promptly. Evidence based medicine (EBM) should reflect the contemporary scientific standard of knowledge. Additional incentives, as e.g. CME-Tools, are necessary to succeed in implementing relevant knowledge or clinical practice guidelines respectively.

Methods

The medical knowledge network evidence.de of Witten/Herdecke University (evidence.de) has developed an internet platform for CME in cooperation with a software house as a public private partnership. The user data are filed on a secured Open-Source server (application server Tomcat, Apache Web server and Linux). An Oracle® database and a content management system (CMS) facilitate the easy input of different MC question blocks. Each block refers to one of the knowledge network's clinical practice guidelines topics. Until June 2003 14 blocks of tasks were designed within the medical faculty and certified by the responsible medical association (Internet: www.evidence.de and www.medizinerwissen.de).

Results

Existing clinical practice guidelines allowed a swift development of questions concerning each medical indication. All questions were evaluated by an editorial group of physicians consisting of General Practitioners (GPs) and internists. A consecutive usability-test with 10 GPs of a quality circle of the university took was positive. Suggestions offered by the users were implemented in an updated version. Between June and August 2003 more than 500 physicians used the platform. 80% of them gave a positive feedback in an evaluation questionnaire.

Conclusions

An online platform for CME can support active learning and may establish an additional stimulus to absorb knowledge relevant for medical practice.

In the future the medical knowledge network will consider following questions:

- Do online platforms for further education facilitate and accelerate knowledge transfer for physicians?
- Which feedback mechanisms should be implemented?
- Would modified versions of such learning platforms be suitable for patients as well?
- Can a CME platform support existing disease management programs?

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