

Parallel Sessions B
B2 – Who Uses the Internet and Why?

Friday, September 20, Room C, 10.30

Medical Information in the Internet: What Do Our Customers Really Need? Results of a Large-Scale WWW-Poll and Consequences for the 'Virtual Library of Medicine'

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In recent years the Internet has become a standard medium for the supply of information in the medical field. There is an incongruity in this situation: users welcome new sources of information we offer but never seem to be completely satisfied. They complain of loss of orientation and information overkill.

We lack an overview of the information habits and needs of our customers. The information we require is when, how often and for what reasons do they need the Internet, what do they expect to find there and what should the role of medical libraries be in this context?

In anticipation of the development of the "Virtual Library of Medicine" in Germany, the German National Library of Medicine initiated a large-scale user study to find out the needs of the potential customers. The method used was a WWW-poll established and evaluated by scientific sociological methods, in which 1.900 users filled out a detailed web-based questionnaire.

The first part of this paper presents the method used and the most important results. It shows that the needs of different user groups diverge in a significant way, especially between academic user and physicians as practitioners. The second part of the paper will illustrate what conclusions have been drawn when developing the "Virtual Library of Medicine" in Germany. The most recent status of this project will be demonstrated.