The development and evaluation of an online oncology portal

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Background: Care for patients with cancer is complex and the number of cancer survivors is increasing. This involves frequent monitoring and adequate medical and psychosocial support. The need for health-related information among cancer patients is large. In Flanders, patients with a chronic disorder show a high degree of interest in online consultation of their medical records.

Methods: An online oncology portal was developed on the basis of literature, best practices and in co-design with patients, health care providers and IT developers. Co-design guarantees that the portal is tailored to the needs of the cancer patients. In this innovative project, a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the portal was performed with patients (n = 45) and care providers (n = 10).

Results: On the platform, the cancer patient can consult their individual treatment plan. In each phase of the care pathway, online information, questionnaires and symptom diaries are attached. The platform provides a secure chat with the care providers (sending messages, video call). An overview of appointments and finally, the patient can access his test results. Patients were positive about the possibility of consulting test results and reporting their side effects. Patients felt safely ‘monitored’ at home and experienced a strict follow-up from the oncology team. Generally, they found the platform user-friendly and complete.

Conclusions: This eHealth project is dynamic and is continuously optimized. This includes the implementation of the portal in patients with other types of cancer and in other hospitals. Finally, a mobile app is developed, signals for care providers are implemented in the system when patients report alarm symptoms and patients are empowered actively offering self-management advice. Up to today, more than 70 healthcare institutions are connected to the eHealth hub and all hospitals have the possibility to use all the functionalities of the oncology platform.

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