

Empowering patients through information technologies

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Patient empowerment is about enabling the patients to be involved in managing disease and adopting and sustaining health promoting behaviors. Patient empowerment, although a popular concept, is rather ill defined. This lecture aims to elucidate the different meanings and perceptions, together with misconceptions, that surround this construct, and to discuss how patient empowerment relates to current medical methodologies, such as evidence based medicine, and other societal and organizational factors. Furthermore, the lecture will provide an overview of how information and communication technologies are employed to empower patients, with emphasis in chronic patients with comorbidities.

The discussion will first address the “who”. This includes an overview of common health problems that call for empowered patients, the types of patients that normally engage in empowering interventions and the specifics of the stakeholders who design and support such interventions.

Then we will look at the “how”. The discussion here will focus on an overview of the diverse approaches and services that have been deployed to empower patients. This will also include the span of various technologies used and, where applicable, their measured induced outcome for the patient and the health care process.

Although the “who” and “how” of patient empowerment can rather easily be discerned from a literature research, the “what” is rather more elusive. The concept of patient empowerment has emerged as a new paradigm that can help improve medical outcomes while lowering costs of treatment by facilitating self-directed behavior change. Patient empowerment has gained even more popularity since the 1990’s, due to the emergent of eHealth and its focus on putting the patient in the centre of the interest. Current literature provides systematic reviews of the area, and shows that well defined areas (or dimensions) have eventually emerged in the field: *education, engagement, and control*. Despite such findings, current research lacks of a structured approach towards patient empowerment. In an attempt to shed more light onto the process of empowering patients, this lecture will discuss a newly proposed holistic model of patient empowerment as a cognitive process, where we acknowledge three levels of increasing complexity and importance: *awareness, participation, and control*.

The lecture will conclude with a proof of concept example of using this approach to develop and evaluate empowerment services for the comorbid cardiorenal patient or the patient at risk of this condition. Open issues and challenges will be presented for discussion with the audience.

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