Attitudes of occupational physicians to the use of electronic technology and paper based systems

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ABSTRACT

Background: Paper based methods have traditionally been the mainstay of medical information systems. However, more recently the use of electronic systems has become widespread. Additionally, the use of electronic methodology in day-to-day tasks beyond the workplace is commonplace.

Aims: To investigate the attitudes of occupational physicians (OPs) to the use of electronic and paper based systems, thereby identifying barriers affecting OPs’ use of electronic systems for work and leisure. Secondly, to assess whether training or confidence levels impact on OPs’ use of electronic systems.

Methods: A cross-sectional questionnaire survey study was conducted using both paper based and electronic formats. The study population comprised OPs who were active participants in the Occupational Physicians Reporting Scheme (OPRA), within The Health and Occupation of Research (THOR) network. Questionnaire responses were analysed to examine the attitudes of OPs towards using electronic or paper based systems at work and in non-work day-to-day tasks.

Results: A total of 193 OPs were eligible to take part in the study. Of these 146 (76%) participated, with 91 (62.3%) responding by paper methods and 55 (37.7%) electronically. The highest proportion of paper based replies came from the 55-64 year age group, while the highest proportion of electronic replies came from those aged 45-54 years. All questionnaire respondents used a computer for at least part of their day, with the majority (94.4%) feeling competent in using a computer, and half (48.3%) having undertaken computer training. Despite widespread use of computers, these OPs expressed concerns regarding security of information and confidentiality relating to their systems.

Conclusions: OPs use paper based and electronic systems, with electronic methodology being commonplace both at work and in their day-to-day (non-work) tasks. Nevertheless, some concerns remain regarding security of information and confidentiality issues, but the precise reasons to account for these attitudes remain unclear.