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THE E-MAIL AS A POTENTIAL THERAPEUTIC TOOL IN PATIENTS WITH ALCOHOL DEPENDENCE: THE PATIENT'S PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction: The use of Internet-based communication tools has spread to multiple areas of life. E-mail is a fast and easy tool that can be used by the health care system to facilitate doctor-patient communication.

Objectives: To assess the use and value of the e-mail for communication between physician and patient, from patients' perspective.

Aims: To evaluate the use of e-mail as a potential therapeutic tool in patients with alcohol dependence.

Methods: The sample included patients who reported to have an e-mail account at their first visit in Alcohol Unit (n=44 of 238 patients seen during one year). 23 patients were given the contact e-mail of the Alcohol Unit, and were instructed to contact their physician, if needed, by e-mail. The rest of the sample (n=21) could contact their physician only by phone. Six months later, the whole sample received an electronic survey measuring their satisfaction of the communication with the physician.

Results: 57% patients who received the contact e-mail of the Alcohol Unit answered the survey (n=13). Of those, 54% used e-mail to contact their physician. 71% found e-mail easy-to-use; 86% reported being satisfied with e-mail communication.

Conclusions: E-mail contact with physician was considered useful by most patients, although they report using also other contact methods, such as phone call.