Chapter 6

# Internet and Online Medical Journal Access Skills of the Medical Practitioners of Tamilnadu:
## A Study

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## ABSTRACT

*This study focuses on the allopathic medical practitioners' skill to use online medical journals and barriers faced while seeking information. Five-hundred-twenty-nine medical practitioners are involved in this study. Among the total sample, one-third of the practitioners have skill to use the online medical journals and the remaining two-thirds of them do not have this skill. Gender and workplace of the practitioners do not have significant association in the access skill of the online medical journals. However, it is reversed for the practitioners' educational qualification. Online medical journal access skill is in descending order of the practitioners' educational qualification. The top three reasons for not using the online journals are presented in descending order: not knowing how to search (69.998%), lack of time (59.721%), and did not know the availability (58.609%). Government bodies (NIC, DPH, DME) and medical associations (IMA, S-IMA) associated with medical librarians may conduct digital information literacy level assessments of the medical practitioners and plan to organise digital information source awareness programs and hands-on training programs to the practitioners at regular intervals.*

## INTRODUCTION

Medical practitioners are using the various formal and informal sources for seeking information for updating their professional skills. In addition to that, they use the non-book sources and digital sources. By the end of 20th century, Information Technology (IT) has changed and transferred the available information in conventional text formats to digitized formats. Before the Information Communication Technology (ICT) era, knowledge of medicine belonged only to the physicians' knowledge. The patient's role in his/her physician's office was simply to listen to the voice of the physicians only. Now, information can be easily and also quickly found out from the Internet at any time. With the help of Internet, in the developed countries, patients are equipped with the knowledge about their health conditions. When they arrive at the clinic, they are armed with full information they have found on the Web with a preconceived idea about their disease, diagnosis, and treatment options, more demanding regarding convenience and ease of access. The patients are empowered by the information technology and its benefits (Grant, 2002).

E-journals, e-books, access of medical database, Internet search engines, open source, and e-mail discussion forums are some of the online sources available in the net. United National Library of Medicine (NLM) and National Institute of Health (NIH) provide free bibliographical database (PUBMED) and also linked to the related articles service to all (Davis, 1992). In India, National Informatics Centre (NIC) is providing INDMED (Indian Medlar) service in health-care, telemedicine and computer and communication technology through the Internet. It provides evidence and knowledge-based information.

Research studies on medical practitioners' information needs and seeking behaviour are taken up more in the developed countries. Medical practitioners of developed countries use the online sources, digital sources, and Internet for their professional development. Developed countries medical practitioners' even rural medical practitioners also using the online sources and Internet for their professional caliber. However, this study is focusing the developing countries medical practitioners' skills to use of the online is timely relevant.

## OBJECTIVES

This study is based on the following main objectives:

1. To find out the allopathic medical practitioners skills to use of the Internet and online medical journals.
2. To find out the practitioners reasons for not using the Internet and online medical journals.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Doctors use two million pieces of information to manage patients but little research has been done on the needs that arise while treating the patients. Textbooks, journals and other existing tools are not adequate to answer the questions that arise. Textbooks are out dated and the journals are too few for them to be useful in daily practice. Computer systems that have been developed to meet doctors' needs are likely to be electronically portable, fast, easy to use, connected to both a large valid database of medical knowledge, patient record and a servant of patient as well as doctors (Smith, 1996).

Access to the Internet is wide spread among the German-speaking Swiss primary care physicians. Only few of the practitioners used the Internet for retrieval during consultation hours. Electronic systems need to be tailored to the needs of primary care physicians. Only 14% of the respondents regularly find it useful. The

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