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Pancreas Platform: Evaluation of a Homepage for Pancreatic Diseases

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The Internet is a rapidly expanding medium which exerts its influence on users all over the world. Considering positive and negative aspects of the medical branch of the Internet, a new medical homepage for pancreatic illnesses is to be created in the form of an English-language Website as a major clinical and research focus. As there is a shortage of sites relating to pancreatic illnesses, this is seen as a necessary development.

The Pancreas Platform Website was created in the autumn of 1996. In order to determine the availability of our site, we performed a search with the key word "pancreas" using several search engines. A questionnaire was sent via e-mail to all visitors sending patient-related e-mails to elicit information and feedback essential to the evaluation and improvement of the site.

From 1/97 until 12/99, all e-mails from visitors to our homepage were collected: contrary to our expectations, the vast majority was patient-related. 95% of patient-related emails pertained to pancreatic illnesses: acute pancreatitis n=21; chronic pancreatitis n=14; idiopathic/hereditary pancreatitis n=6; pancreatic carcinoma n=12. In response to specific requests, responses were sent by the staff concerning illness n=40; referral to a specialist/Website n=10; interpretation of clinical findings n=12; dietary advice n=19. 35% of the 82 patients visiting our site responded to the questionnaire in some form. Nineteen (19) completed questionnaires were returned to us: most came from the US (n=14) and Germany (n=2). The main illnesses involved were acute pancreatitis n=10 and chronic pancreatitis n=5.

Our homepage, Pancreas Platform, a professional service concerning pancreatic diseases, has been shown to be a welcome addition to the medical Internet, when used responsibly as a supplement to information given by patients' home physicians