

PRESS RELEASE

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Almost one in two (47%) use 'Dr Google' before GP consultations

A YouGov online survey has revealed that almost half of the public (47%) has searched online for their symptoms and / or possible diagnosis before visiting their GP.¹

The survey of over 2000 British adults, commissioned by Medical Protection, also showed that one in five members of the public (21%) has challenged their GP's diagnosis, and that 50% of the public agree that their GP should always give them the prescription, treatment, or referral to a specialist they request.¹

While 80% of the public do believe that their GP does meet their needs and expectations, 86% of Medical Protection members said that they sometimes, most of the time or always encounter challenging experiences with patients when they do not provide the prescription, treatment, or referral to a specialist they request.²

Dr Pallavi Bradshaw, Senior Medicolegal Adviser at Medical Protection said it was positive that patients are taking a more active role in their own healthcare, but stressed that it can present some challenges for GPs.

"It is reassuring that 80% of the public believe that their GP does meet their needs and expectations.¹ However, with 'Dr Google' becoming more influential in the consultation room, it is more important than ever for GPs to understand how to manage patient expectations," she said.

"Patients who search their symptoms and possible diagnosis online before visiting their GP may have a preconceived idea of what their diagnosis is and how the condition should be treated. When these expectations are not met, it can lead to patients feeling dissatisfied, a breakdown in the doctor-patient relationship and a greater risk of the patient pursuing a complaint or claim against the GP."

Dr Bradshaw continued: "GPs should always try to establish exactly what their patient's expectations are and whether they have any specific anxieties. There should also be a focus on clearly addressing expectations throughout the consultation and involving the patient in decisions around how to manage any issues. Where a patient has a false belief or unrealistic expectation, it should not be dismissed without a discussion and explanation of how and why an alternative option is in the patient's best interests. These are the fundamental rules of shared decision making; a practise whereby doctors have a professional, legal and ethical obligation to involve patients in decisions around their own care.

"During the consultation, it may also be appropriate for GPs to encourage patients to be cautious about self-diagnosis via the internet. They can also guide patients to useful health resources and patient group sites which may help with their ongoing healthcare."

Ends.

For further information or to arrange an interview with Dr Bradshaw, please contact Shannon Darling, Medical Protection Press Officer on +44 (0)207 3991 319 or email shannon.darling@medicalprotection.org

Notes to editor:

1. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2021 British adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 26 – 31 May 2016. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).
2. Medical Protection conducted a survey of 707 GP members in May 2016 to determine their views on patient expectations.
3. Medical Protection offers a *Mastering Shared Decision Making* three hour workshop, which looks at how various pressures relating to shared decision making can be addressed practically in a consultation. For further information, please click [here](#).
4. Medical Protection also offers whole day Masterclasses, which give doctors the opportunity to test a range of skills (including assessing and managing patient expectations and practising shared decision making) on professional actors. Doctors highly rate the feedback received from the actors and from the clinicians who run these. For further information, please click [here](#).
5. Dr Pallavi Bradshaw is a senior medicolegal adviser at Medical Protection. She graduated from St Catharine's College, Cambridge, gaining a BA (Hons) with a dissertation in Medical Law and Ethics. She trained at Addenbrooke's Hospital and graduated from the clinical school in December 2001.

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Our in-house experts assist with the wide range of legal and ethical problems that arise from professional practice. This can include clinical negligence claims, complaints, medical and dental council inquiries, legal and ethical dilemmas, disciplinary procedures, inquests and fatal accident inquiries.

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