

Study shows we trust the stethoscope

August 13 2012, By Kristy Jones

(Medical Xpress) -- A Curtin University study has shown doctors seeking to earn their clients' trust while conducting e-consultations should wear a stethoscope and surround themselves with medical tools of the trade.

The six-month e-health research project was undertaken by a group of researchers at the Curtin Health Innovation Research Institute (CHIRI) and funded by Curtin's Office of Research and Development.

The researchers investigated the process of providing e-consultations, and whether the presence of 'iconic' medical symbols like a stethoscope, surgical scrubs or a reflex hammer would help doctors build a relationship of trust online. .

Medical e-consultations make use of electronic computing and communication technologies in the consultation processes, particularly when a client is unable to see a doctor face-to-face.

In the study, a series of images portraying different combinations of medical tools were shown to 168 people who ranked them by how trustworthy they looked.

The stethoscope was ranked the most positive by participants, receiving a rating of 95 per cent. Words associated with the medical device included honest, trustworthy, honourable, moral, ethical and genuine.

Professor Moyez Jiwa, Chair of CHIRI Chronic Disease and research

leader, said the findings were particularly important to the medical field given its growth in the e-health field.

“We have doctor shortages across Australia, especially in rural regions, and we know that more doctors will be providing e-consultations to clients in an attempt to respond to the increasing demand for medical advice,” Professor Jiwa said.

“Applications are being developed in this area every day, so it’s really important when images of [doctors](#) or health professionals are used that a stethoscope is worn to build a relationship of trust.

“Our research also highlighted that although the [stethoscope](#) was singularly the most trusted medical tool the combination of three or more items of medical equipment in an image would also have a positive influence on the client.”

More information: The research project was featured in the July issue of the *Journal of Medical Internet Research*.

Provided by Curtin University

Citation: Study shows we trust the stethoscope (2012, August 13) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-08-stethoscope.html>

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