Study investigates online information available to lung cancer patients

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(Medical Xpress)—Researchers from The University of Manchester have begun a study to look at the online information available to lung cancer patients in an era of diagnosis by google.

Lung cancer affects around 41,000 people in the UK each year and has one of the lowest survival rates of any cancer, which experts think is partly because people do not get treatment early enough or recognise the symptoms.

The Medical Research Council-funded study will include a systematic review of the information about lung cancer currently available online to see how this can be improved.

Patients diagnosed with lung cancer within the last six months will also be interviewed about how they found out they had the disease.

Chief investigator Julia Mueller, based in the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work at The University of Manchester – part of Manchester Cancer Research Centre, said: "Lung cancer survival rates remain very low compared to breast cancer and there is some evidence to suggest that patients wait too long before going to their doctor.

"The research will look at what health information systems people use after they are having symptoms and what influences their decision to see a doctor.

"We will also look at the information available when people google terms like nagging cough, tiredness, weight loss and how that influences their decision about whether to go and see a doctor."

Academics from both health sciences and computing will team up for the study which aims to recruit 100 patients from the North West to take part.

The results will be used to improve information about the disease available online and search engine optimisation for patients researching their symptoms of lung cancer online.

Ms Mueller added: "The results should help us to look at how people get to these websites and what search terms they are using so that we can make sure they are directed to useful sites."

"Once we have this information from patients we plan to use it to create a smart recommender system based on an understanding of online behaviour of people with lung cancer, so that existing websites can be optimised and to help direct more people to the right information."

If you were recently diagnosed with lung cancer and are interested in taking part in the study, please email julia.mueller@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk or see www.jnmueller.com/phd-study for further information.

Provided by University of Manchester

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