



Use of Groupware or other Information Technologies in P&T Committees



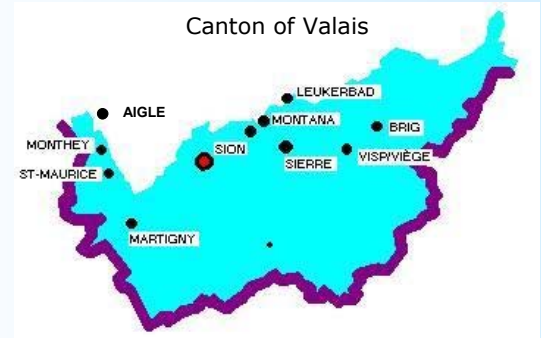
Viviane Amos, Johnny Beney

Institut Central des Hôpitaux Valaisans (ICHV), Division pharmacie, Sion, Switzerland

Background and Objective

The pharmacy of the ICHV located in Sion provides drugs and pharmaceutical services to a hospital network located in the canton of Valais. Due to geographical distance (hospitals are distributed over a 100 km long area, see map) and time constraints, P&T Committee meetings are difficult to organize. Groupware (computer-based systems that support group work), could resolve this issue.

Our objective was to determine if groupware has been used within P&T Committees or other health care oriented committees.



Design

Literature review : search in 3 databases : PubMed (medical database), International Pharmaceutical Abstracts (pharmaceutical database) and CSA Computer Technology (technological database), plus hand search in selected journals.

Setting

Pharmacy of the ICHV : centralized pharmacy in the canton of Valais (Switzerland).

Main outcome measures

Use of groupware within P&T or similar health care committees.

Results

37 references on the use of groupware tools or other information technologies (intranet, personal digital assistant, e-mail) were identified. The use of groupware among P&T Committees was yet not described. However, an Ethic Committee [1] and a Committee formed to integrate research into clinical nursing practice [2] reported experience with the following groupware tools : electronic mail and a software program for discussion and commentary. Advantages and disadvantages of electronic communication over face to face meeting were :

Advantages of groupware tools	Disadvantages of groupware tools
Time gain	A low frequency of e-mail checking can influence response time
Possibility of data storage and processing which allows rapid information retrieval	Possibility of data storage and processing may be a negative factor if members' level of trust in one another is low
Enhancement of communication between committee members may increase productivity	Possible members' reluctance to engage in electronic communication
Modification of social interactions may result in more effective information transfer/dialogue, resulting in higher quality output	Absence of non verbal clues (body language, facial expression, etc) that may cause misunderstanding and reduce the sense of reciprocal obligation

Both committees concluded that face to face meetings should not be completely replaced by electronic communication.

Conclusion

Few evidences of the usefulness of groupware in health care committees exist. Two relevant studies conclude that electronic mail and discussion software allow committees to overcome time and geographical constraints. These applications may reduce the number of face to face meetings, but not replace them completely. These conclusions are probably also valid for P&T committees. While policy issues and complex decisions can be addressed at regularly scheduled meetings, groupware tools could be helpful for straightforward choices or when urgent decisions are required (e.g. in case of drug shortage). Studies are needed to validate this hypothesis.

References

- [1] A Eiser et All; Electronic communication in ethics committees : experience and challenges; J of Med Ethics 2001; 27 suppl I:i30-i32.
- [2] B A Raket; Committee meeting, an electronic alternative; Nurs Manag 1996;27(7):32F-32G.