

## **Exploring doctors' communication with adolescent patients about their use of digital health information**

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**Background** Adolescent patients increasingly access digital health information to inform an understanding of their health, however their ability to find, understand and appraise this information, known as their digital health literacy, is variable. Ongoing support is required to improve adolescent digital health literacy, and doctors, being adolescents' most trusted source of health information, are well placed to provide this advice. However, there is a gap in our understanding of doctors' communication with adolescent patients about their use of digital health information.

**Aim** We aimed to understand doctors' experiences, attitudes and approaches to communicating with and providing advice to adolescent patients about their use of digital health information.

**Methods** This exploratory qualitative study utilised semi-structured, one-on-one interviews to explore the experiences of a heterogeneous cohort of doctors at the Children's Hospital at Westmead. Interviews were in person or via Zoom and ranged from 20 – 50min. Data were analysed through theoretical thematic analysis based on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory.

**Results** A total of 12 doctors were interviewed. Three key themes were identified. The role of doctors' understanding, attitudes and communication practices regarding adolescents' use of digital health information framed the consultation and influenced adolescents' engagement. When looking to bring digital health information into the consultation, adolescents and doctors differed in their approaches. It was recognised that both doctors and adolescents have a role in providing advice related to use of digital health information.

**Conclusions** This study emphasises the evolving role of digital health information in the doctor – adolescent patient relationship, highlighting that effective communication and tailored advice regarding use of digital health information are key to empowering adolescents. We propose integrating digital health information further in clinical practice to assist in identifying and bridging potential gaps in adolescents' understanding, emphasising the importance of engagement and mutual learning between doctors and their adolescent patients.