

Videoconferencing to enhance the integration between clinical medicine and teaching: a feasibility study

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ABSTRACT

Aims and background. The aim of the study was to analyze the feasibility of a setting up of a radiotherapy department using videoconferencing technology.

Material and methods. A videoconferencing network was started to link an academic center of radiotherapy to a peripheral center of research at the start of its activity. Two years of data of involved professionals, subjects of links, audio, video link problems and running costs were recorded.

Results. A total of 418 links was established for an overall duration of 458 hours. The participants included all departmental staff. Videoconferencing involved teaching, ward organization, medical care and scientific subjects. In the second year of experience, the number of videoconferencing links was higher than the first (232 vs 186). Link times were reasonable for both skilled and unskilled operators. Overall, the cost per minute of link was 0.2 Euro, and the mean cost per link was 13 Euros. Videoconferencing was integrated with fax and computer networks to enhance sharing paper and electronic documents. Audio-video technical problems progressively decreased: the link was definitively interrupted or its activation unfeasible in only 1.0% of cases.

Conclusions. Our experience suggests that the establishment of a link between radiotherapy departments addressed to these aims is feasible by a videoconferencing network.

Key words: distance education, feasibility, radiotherapy, telemedicine, videoconference.

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