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## Patients wish to converse with their doctor

Nine out of ten people in the United Kingdom were ill at least once in the past year. At the start of an illness, there is more chance of one seeking out information oneself and consulting a doctor only afterwards. These days, patients show a clear urge to know what is wrong with their body. Furthermore, people increasingly wish to be better prepared when calling at the doctor's. A growing number of patients even seek out beforehand which treatment they would prefer, and which medication they would like their doctor to prescribe. This is of course quite a challenge for the doctor, who must manage to somehow find a new balance between expertise and empathy in his / her busy schedule.

A total of 2,800 patients took part in the European InSites Consulting health survey.

### Patients first look for information and go to their doctors next

The InSites Consulting survey defined a 'patient' as a person who, in the past year, suffered from an acute, chronic (longer than one month) or recurring complaint. Across all complaints that were recorded, there was one obvious constant: as soon as a patient is taken ill, there is a significantly larger chance that he / she will seek out information him/herself regarding the condition and only then consult a physician.

In their quest for information the Internet is the patients' number one source of information par excellence. More than half of the patients look for their information online. Therefore it does not come as a surprise that Google witnessed a significant increase in health-related searches over the last few years and that a particular channel (i.e. Google Health) turned out to be a sound choice.

### Patients report a lack of empathy on behalf of doctors

Whereas patients seem to be searching for more dialogue with their doctors rather than merely a one-way diagnosis, doctors don't always have the time and / or the intention to increase the patients' involvement in the health management. Throughout Europe as well as in the UK, patients rate their doctors as poorly or very poorly in terms of their ability to empathise. In addition to their inability to empathise, patients also say that they feel that their doctors show little or no respect for them during their conversations.

"Doctors don't always benefit from the Internet. Patients can find virtually everything online, and doctors don't always have the time nor the openness to integrate this into their consultations. Nonetheless it is an important challenge which today's doctors are facing to involve patients more in their own health management and to somehow find a place for these new media. This will not only result in an increase in a patient's trust in their doctor; patients will also better respect the treatment course when they see the underlying reasons", says Magali Geens, Research Director Health.

### Patients are requesting specific treatments

The more a patient can contribute to the conversation with the doctor, the more there is a chance that the patient will feel like having an influence on the nature of their own treatment, or even on the specific medication which is recommended or prescribed by the doctor.

In Italy – and to a lesser extent in France – there still exists a more traditional patient-doctor relationship. The patient is 'subservient' to the doctor and submits to his / her diagnosis and prescriptions. Opposite that we have the Netherlands, followed closely by Germany. In these countries, patient emancipation is much more advanced. More and more patients converse with their doctors, which results in their reporting a greater impact on the outcome of their visit to the doctor's.

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In the UK, the patient's contribution to a conversation with the doctor is more limited compared to the European average. However, the impact people report having on their treatment is higher than average. This discrepancy – contributing relatively little information, and yet having a rather important impact on the choices which are made – is partially clarified by the less close relationship between doctors and patients in the UK in comparison with other West European countries. In the UK, only 7 people out of 10 have a fixed GP (compared to more than 90% elsewhere) and this may even decrease in the future. Therefore it is probable that patients are following their own past treatments better and are therefore in a better position to point out certain treatments to their doctors which proved successful in the past.

Magali Geens: “The survey clearly shows that this trend will increase in the future. Doctors must be better trained to deal with these newly emancipated patients (...) It is also a mistake to assume that it is particularly the younger generation which is conversing with their doctors on the basis of Internet printouts. We have established that it is in fact the 55+ age group which presents the emancipation and the urge for more impact in these matters.”

This information is yielded through a survey initiated by InSites Consulting – Health. This survey was carried out at the beginning of this year in seven European countries. In terms of methodology, an online survey was used. The survey was carried out in Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy. A total of more than 1,000 registrations (of illnesses) were made per country and over 2,800 patients filled out the questionnaire.

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Contact: **Magali Geens**  
**Research Director Health**  
[magali.geens@insites.eu](mailto:magali.geens@insites.eu)  
T +32 9 269 16 04 | M +32 497 523 526

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