**Introduction:** An increasing number of patients are accessing the internet for medical information which provides current information on illnesses, prognosis and treatment options. To date there are relatively few studies that have evaluated its use by patients who seek information online.

The purpose of this study was to 1) determine patient access to the internet 2) determine the proportion of patients seeking medical information online 3) Assess patient attitudes towards the internet.

**Materials and Methods:** Patients in the orthopaedic outpatients were presented with survey forms over a period of 2 months (September to November 2004). Completed survey forms were then assessed for patient demographics, internet access and attitudes towards online medical information.

**Results:** 189 patients attending the orthopaedic outpatients completed the questionnaires. Mean age of outpatients being 47.5yrs (15 to 86yrs). 61% had access to a computer, 64% had used the internet at some point, 35% of those attending the outpatients had accessed the internet to obtain medical information for their current medical condition. The largest age group of internet users was 20-39 yrs.

Of those who accessed medical information online, 77% stated the internet was reliable, 86% stated that it improved their understanding of the current medical condition, 33% stated that the information online was more than that provided by the clinician, 30% stated the information online improved their health behaviour, 3.5% stated the information online led them to seek a second opinion, 75% stated it was a valuable supplement to a doctor and 93% stated it was Not a substitute to a doctor.

**Discussion:** The internet is a rich source of medical information which is frequently accessed by patients for additional information. The content of the information is variable as it is vastly unedited and unregulated and may be used by organizations for profit or non-profit purposes.

As clinicians it is important to realize the increasing number of patients accessing medical information online such that patients are better informed about their medical conditions.

**References:**