

Beyond Known Barriers – Perspectives on Open Records in Germany:
A Qualitative Study among General Practitioners and Advanced Medical Students

Julia Müller, WS 2019/2020

BACKGROUND Open access to medical records can improve the patients' health-related knowledge and understanding, self-care, treatment adherence, and can facilitate the doctor-patient-communication. While Open Records was successfully implemented before, it remains an exception in German general practices. Besides already known implementation barriers, the doctors' reluctance towards Open Records influences their approval. The doctors' professional self-conception can be a reason for their reluctance in that it contrasts with the characteristics of Open Records.

OBJECTIVE This study aims to provide a better understanding of the general practitioners' and advanced medical students' perspectives on Open Records beyond the known barriers. It focuses on the professional self-conception as an influence on their approval for Open Records.

METHODS Data were collected through semi-structured guide-based interviews with 7 general practitioners and 7 advanced medical students (N=14). Participants were asked to share their perspectives on Open Records in German general practices, as well as their perceived implications, their expectations of future medical records, and the conditions for an implementation. Data were pseudonymized, audiotaped, and transcribed verbatim. Themes and subthemes were identified through Thematic Analysis. Data were organized and coded by using MAXQDA Standard 2018 (Release 18.2.0). Participant characteristics were analyzed descriptively by using Excel (Release 16.28).

RESULTS When assessing Open Records in German general practices, doctors and medical students reported barriers and potential advantages. The barriers (1) data security, (2) an increased workload, (3) costs, (4) the patients' limited capabilities, and (5) the physicians' restraints were identified. As advantages, (I) patient education and empowerment, (II) a positive impact on the practice, and (III) improved quality of care were mentioned. Beyond these already known aspects, the doctors' professional self-conception emerged to influence their approval for Open Records: Doctors considered their aspiration for professional autonomy and freedom from external control to be threatened and their knowledge-based support of patients to be obstructed by Open Records. Conversely, medical students emphasized the chance of encouraging patients and achieving shared decision making through Open Records. While students expected the implementation in Germany to be realistic in the future, GPs were more

hesitant and voiced a strong resistance towards sharing personal notes. Reliable technical conditions, the participants' consent, and a joint development of the implementation project to meet the GPs' interests were requested.

CONCLUSION Open Records was proven beneficial before and can be a chance to improve health care. Although the medical students' positive attitude towards the concept provides an optimistic view for a future implementation, the doctors' professional values must be respected and complied with. Further research and a broad support of decision makers is crucial to realize the opportunities related to giving patients access to their records in Germany.

KEY WORDS Open record, personal health record, barriers, doctors' perspective, medical profession