

# New Patient Interaction Formulas in Spanish and Catalan: A Case for Forumclinic

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**Abstract.** On February of 2007, *forumclinic* ([www.forumclinic.org](http://www.forumclinic.org)) was launched. This free, first of its kind, collection of Evidence-Based Medicine chronic disease monograph resources, is targeted for Spanish and Catalan-speaking patients. Information is available both online (i.e., forums) and offline (i.e., DVDs) and is culturally sensitive to the target population. *Forumclinic* has centered on active patient engagement through the use of disease-specialist moderated forms. Both the Health on the Net Foundation and the Medical Doctors College of Barcelona have accredited *forumclinic* as a quality, unbiased, health site that is based on the WHO premise of Social Determinants of Health – increased health education and interaction leads to better health. This descriptive paper will introduce *forumclinic* and describe the patient/user response to date.

**Keywords.** e-Health, medical forums, chronic disease, patient 2.0, forum-based support groups

## 1. Introduction

The current incidence of chronic diseases coupled with a growingly aging population has highlighted the importance of chronic disease prevention [1]. Today, the increased global healthcare delivery strain is shifting delivery of care paradigms. In essence, current models of patient care need to be revised to include the empowered patient caveat as the centre of healthcare delivery. Patients will also need to make the corresponding substantial changes to their lifestyle. Empowered patient-cantered care can only be achieved when the patient is provided with the necessary information to acquire, adopt, and maintain this new prevention focused skill-set [2].

We are faced with a growing need for quality health information from the population in general whilst seeing an ever-expanding capacity for accessibility to

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information due to new forms of information communication technologies. This large expansion has resulted in a proliferation of content that, at times, can be of dubious quality and against the patient's best interests; this is particularly the case with the large amount of data created in social media (i.e., Web 2.0 tools and services).

Based on research conducted by Ronald E. Rize (Dr. Rice is the Arthur N. Rupe Chair in the Social Effects of Mass Communication at the University of California in Santa Barbara), J.E. Katz (James E. Katz, Ph.D., is professor and chair of the Department of Communication at Rutgers University; Professor Katz has devoted much of his career to exploring the social consequences of new communication technologies in Health Communication) on the Internet [3], *forumclinic* was developed with a twofold objective: to generate quality information and to facilitate a meeting point between health care professionals and patients; an area identified by Rice and Katz to be in most need of improvement.

2. Method

2.1. What is *forumclinic*?

*Forumclinic* is a set of audiovisual material (DVDs and Website) in both Spanish and Catalan that was launched in February of 2007. It is aimed at improving access to quality health information, and thereby increasing the quality of life of chronically ill patients.

All published content is subject to a selection and priority criteria; thus far we have published the following ten patient monographs: ischemic cardiopathy, diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, schizophrenia, breast cancer, depression, cardiovascular risk factors, obesity, bipolar disorder, arthritis and arthrosis. Figure 1 displays the DVD layout, each produced in Catalan and Spanish separately and distributed by health care professionals without cost at the time of diagnosis. Spanish and Catalan monographs are individually produced along with health care professional interviews in the corresponding language to increase patient engagement and maintain the cultural identity of Catalan and Spanish speakers.



Figure 1. The *forumclinic* offline monographs (DVDs)

The live web portal ([www.forumclinic.org](http://www.forumclinic.org)) is a collection of general interest content in text and multimedia formats along with condition-specialist moderated forums and an editor's blog, which provide direct, two-way, interaction with the public.

Each illness has its own website where patients can find four distinct types of information:

- “You Should Know” text-based information that was originally prepared as the DVD-format script.
- Recent news items related to the illness (i.e., lay translation of high impact, medical journals or news reports)
- 3D animations and videos that explain biological mechanisms, diagnostic procedures, among other aspects of the disease in lay terms.
- Health care professional disease-specialist moderated discussion forums.



Figure 2. The *forumclinic* portal

## 2.2. The Content Generation Process

The BBVA Foundation, a non-profit organization from the Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria Bank, has financed *Forumclinic*. Our funding, was conditional in that we must provide high quality, unbiased-information, without medical-industry sponsorship, particularly from the pharmaceutical industry.

Authors are practicing physicians or healthcare professionals from hospitals, clinics and associated health centres in Barcelona. Our published information combines the best scientific evidence, the practicing professionals' experience and the individual patient's perspective. It is available both through a free DVD or a web portal that contains all the DVD information along with recent chronic disease-specific updates and forums.

*Forumclinic* has received accreditation from the Health On the Net Foundation, (<http://www.hon.ch>), and the Barcelona Physician Institute. Our accreditation was based on the following standards:

- Honesty and Transparency: from the site provider, from the aim and objective of the site, from the target group and from the site's source of finance.

- Authority: Declaration of sources of all information provided together with dates of publication of the source.
- Privacy and data protection
- That all information be up-to-date
- Responsibility
- Accessibility

The full *Forumclinic* neutrality criteria are beyond the scope of this paper but may be found on our website [4].

### 2.3. New Patient Interaction Formulas in Spanish and Catalan

*Forumclinic*'s health care professional disease-specialist moderated discussion forums have built chronic disease virtual patient communities as defined by Barry Welman: "a network of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, [belonging], and social identity." Our forums facilitate dynamic group interactions between professionals and patients through a "suggest a topic" box.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Without advertisement in other websites, *forumclinic*'s audience has increased dramatically over the last few months. The following data were collected using Google Analytics, an Internet Protocol (IP) tracking service that allows visitor characterization based on time spent on website and physical user geographical location:

- *Forumclinic* receives an average of 2,000+ visitors every day, half of which are located in Latin America (Figure 3).
- Schizophrenia, depression & breast cancer, are the most visited forums.
- Our forums represent approximately 22% of all web visits with a participation rate between 1.15% and 5.5%, depending on the chronic disease.
- To date, *forumclinic* has distributed 195,000 free DVDs at Spanish Health Centres and patient groups.

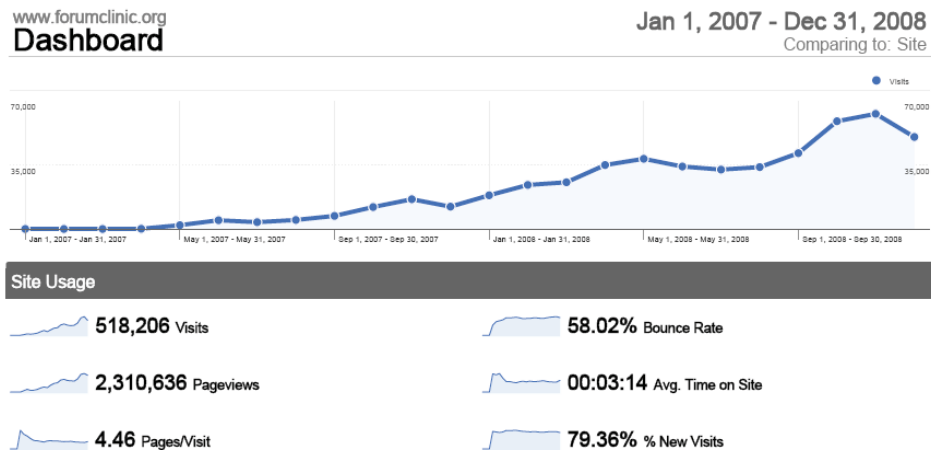


Figure 3. The *forumclinic* audience

Figure 3 displays the Google Analytics Dashboard; it displays a 58% Bounce rate (the percentage of visitors who go onto other after the initial visit). Additionally, Figure 4 displays the distribution of website visitors who interacted in forums during the year 2008. From these metrics, it is clear that *Forumclinic* is addressing the need for high quality, neutral, information for the Hispanic and Catalan audiences. In the upcoming months we will be doing a user evaluation and targeting an online learning system to increase patient engagement in high quality chronic disease education.

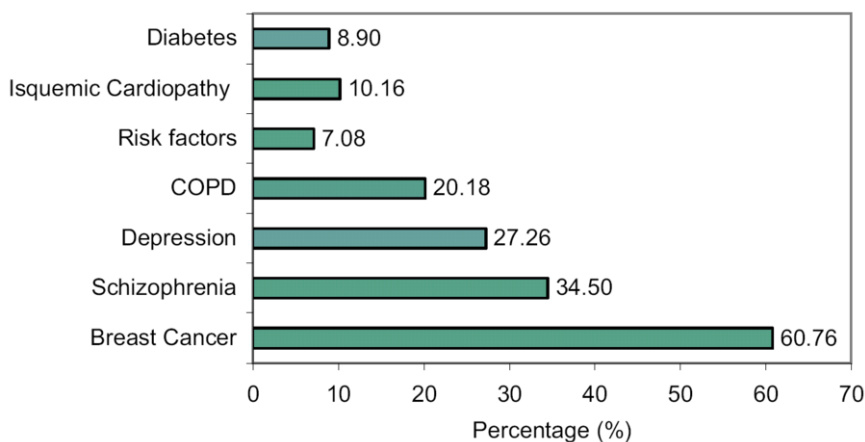


Figure 4. Distribution of *forumclinic* visitors who interact in forums

#### 4. Conclusion

*Forumclinic*'s growth rate that can be seen in the number of visits the portal is currently receiving, as well as in the number of patient forum posts. The penetration rate and requests for our DVD's has confirmed the need for validated chronic disease information in Spanish and Catalan. *Forumclinic* has proved to be a useful electronic tool for bidirectional communication between health care professionals and patients and is expected to increase in the dissemination of scientific knowledge for the general public in the years to come.

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