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# General Practice training, Web 2.0 and virtual communities of practice : a survey study

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## Publication Details

Barnett, S., Jones, S. C., Barrie, L. R., Bonney, A. D. & Iverson, D. C. (2011). General Practice training, Web 2.0 and virtual communities of practice : a survey study. 2011 PHC Research Conference: Inspirations, Collaborations, Solutions Australia: PHC Australia.

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# General Practice training, Web 2.0 and virtual communities of practice : a survey study

## **Abstract**

### Aims & rationale/Objectives

General Practice training faces geographic barriers to efficient knowledge sharing, collaboration and professional and social support amongst its participants. In industry, large companies use internet tools to create Virtual Communities of Practice which improve collaboration, information sharing and support amongst staff. This study examined the feasibility of using Web 2.0 tools to create a Virtual Community of Practice for GP training.

### Methods

A crosssectional online survey was conducted in a Regional GP Training Provider (RTP). The instrument contained categorical and 5-point ascending Likert response format items and was sent to all registrars and supervisors in the RTP. Descriptive analyses were undertaken to highlight overall trends. T-Test was used to compare differences between means for the 5-point response items, and Chi-square for proportions.

### Principal findings

The response rate was 36% (total n=131, registrar n=81, supervisor n=50). Mean responses for confidence in using internet browsers were similar (registrar=4.15 SD=0.64, supervisor=4.04, SD=0.78, p=0.71), however confidence using discussion forums was higher for registrars compared with supervisors (mean=3.40, SD 1.02 vs. 2.98, SD 1.29; p<0.05). Mean response for registrars' interest in a private social network for training purposes was 3.96, SD 0.71.

### Implications

This study shows that supervisors and registrars have confidence in internet usage and that particularly registrars are interested in a private social network for training purposes. GP training faces some geographical and workplace barriers. Virtual Communities of Practice and Web 2.0 tools may help to improve GP training by overcoming geographic barriers and therefore should be further investigated.

## **Keywords**

general, 2, practice, communities, virtual, training, web, survey, study

## **Disciplines**

Medicine and Health Sciences

## **Publication Details**

Barnett, S., Jones, S. C., Barrie, L. R., Bonney, A. D. & Iverson, D. C. (2011). General Practice training, Web 2.0 and virtual communities of practice : a survey study. 2011 PHC Research Conference: Inspirations, Collaborations, Solutions Australia: PHC Australia.

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### Title of abstract

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General Practice training, Web 2.0 and Virtual Communities of Practice

### Aims & rationale

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General Practice training faces geographic barriers to efficient knowledge sharing, collaboration and professional and social support amongst its participants. Training takes place in small groups within practices over a widely distributed geographic area, away from the larger groups of doctors found in hospital based training. Groups of doctors training together can be described as Communities of Practice- "a group of people engaged in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour" (Wenger). In industry, large companies use internet tools to create Virtual Communities of Practice which improve collaboration, information sharing and support amongst staff. In health, Internet Based Learning has already been shown to be as effective as traditional methods, particularly interactive and collaborative solutions. Web 2.0 tools are interactive and collaborative and form the basis of many online communities. This study examined the feasibility of using Web 2.0 tools to create a Virtual Community of Practice for GP training.

### Methods – in detail

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A cross-sectional online survey was conducted in a Regional GP Training Provider. The instrument contained categorical and 5-point ascending Likert response format items and was sent to all registrars and supervisors in the RTP. Descriptive analyses were undertaken to highlight overall trends. T-Test was used to compare differences between means for the 5-point response items, and Chi-square for proportions.

### Findings

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The response rate was 36% (total n=131, registrar n=81, supervisor n=50). Mean responses for confidence in using internet browsers were similar (registrar=4.15 SD=0.64, supervisor=4.04, SD=0.78, p=0.71), however confidence using discussion forums was higher for registrars compared with supervisors (mean=3.40, SD 1.02 vs. 2.98, SD 1.29; p<0.05). Mean response for registrars' interest in a private social network for training purposes was 3.96, SD 0.71. For registrars, the applications with the highest interest were video tutorials (81.5%), moderated forums on clinical (70.4%) and exam (71.6%) topics and a shared resource area (75.3%).

### Benefits to the community

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This study shows that supervisors and registrars have confidence in internet usage and that particularly registrars are interested in a private social network for training purposes. As General Practice forms the basis of a strong health system, good General Practice training is essential. However GP training faces some geographical and workplace barriers. Given the potential for Virtual Communities of Practice and Web 2.0 tools to overcome geographic barriers and thus improve GP training and healthcare delivery, Virtual Communities of Practice for GP training should be further investigated.

Word Count

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