



Doctors spend third of time with patients looking at computer

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CHICAGO, Jan. 23 (UPI) -- CHICAGO, Jan. 23 (UPI) -- Doctors spend about a third of their visits looking at a computer screen and as a result their communication with patients suffers, U.S. researchers say.

First author Enid Montague, an assistant professor at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine and an assistant professor in industrial engineering at the McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science, said when physicians spend too much time looking at the computer screen in the exam room, non-verbal cues might get overlooked and affect doctors' ability to pay attention and communicate with patients.

"It's likely that the ability to listen, problem-solve and think creatively is not optimal when physicians' eyes are glued to the screen," Montague said in a statement.

Northwestern scientists recorded 100 doctor-patient visits using video cameras in which doctors used computers to access electronic health records. The videos were used to analyze eye-gaze patterns and how they affected communication behavior between patients and clinicians.

"We found that physician/patient eye-gaze patterns are different during a visit in which electronic health records versus a paper-chart visit are used," Montague said. "Not only does the doctor spend less time looking at the patient, the patient also almost always looks at the computer screen, whether or not the patient can see or understand what is on the screen."

The findings were published in the journal *Medical Informatics*.

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