

Original Article

NFZ Health Academy – approaches used by the National Health Fund (NFZ) to promote healthy lifestyle and physical activity among Poles via web and social media during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

The idea of health promotion is old but during the COVID-19 Pandemic it has caught the world's general population's eye. The Internet has become an important source of health information for patients and the general population of Poland. NFZ's Health Academy is a portal of the National Health Fund (an agenda of Polish Ministry of Health which is the government's department) with informational and educational resources designated for medical staff and Polish society. There are multiple e-books, films, diet plans, interviews with medical and health care specialists, training programmes available on NFZ's Health Academy's website and social media accounts. However, till this day according to this article's authors' best knowledge there has been no evaluation, research or deeper analysis of NFZ's Health Academy's content. The aim of the study was to analyse and describe informational and educational resources available on NFZ's Health Academy's website, YouTube channel and Facebook account. The study was conducted using qualitative and quantitative methods of using Google Trends' search engine and analysing obtained results. The results of the study show that, The National Health Fund (NFZ) promotes healthy lifestyle and physical activity among Poles via webs and social media during the COVID-19 pandemic in quite effective ways. The quality of information offered by NFZ's Health Academy compared to other free media is good and you can count on evidence-based health education and promotion. It seems that the informational and educational resources provided by the National Health Fund for the Poles were mostly needed, especially in regions like Zachodniopomorskie voivodeship, Podlaskie voivodeship, Pomorskie voivodeship, Mazowieckie voivodeship and Wamińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship.

Key words: health, lifestyle, physical activity, internet

Introduction

The idea of health promotion is not new but during the COVID-19 Pandemic it has caught the world's general population's eye. Before I start describing and evaluating a health promotion initiative I need to explain the meaning of health promotion. Over the last few decades there have been lots of health promotion's definitions and I have chosen to present only a few of them. According to Lalonde (1974) health promotion is "A strategy aimed at informing, influencing and assisting both individuals and organizations so that they will accept more responsibility and be more active in matters affecting mental and physical health". O'Donnell (1989) describes health promotion as "The science and art of helping people choose their lifestyles to move toward a state of optimal health". US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (1979) defines health promotion as "A combination of health education and related organizational, political and economic programs designed to support changes in behavior and in the environment that will improve health" (Green, 1979). Whereas Labonté & Little (1992) believe that health promotion is "Any activity or program designed to improve social and environmental living conditions such that people's experience of well-being is increased".

Health education to society is an integral part of health promotion and healthcare management (Win, 2015). According to the Bangkok Card, health promotion should be the focal point of public interest (WHO, 2005). Health campaigns using traditional media, were characterized by proven effectiveness and significant efficiency in terms of range or increasing public awareness (Newbold, 2011). In recent years, the Internet has been growing more and more often as the first source of information on health care (Van De Belt, 2013) and the number of studies has shown that the applications of the Internet in the field of public health are quite effective (Bennett & Glasgow, 2009).

The term Health 2.0 (Medicine 2.0) was created emphasizing the importance of using Web 2.0 tools for health purposes. Exact definition of these concepts and the strict definition of their boundaries raise a lot of

controversies (Van De Belt, 2010). The idea of Web 2.0, Health2.0 is based on openness, cooperation, participation and building relationships (both between patients, and healthcare professionals) (Eysenbach, 2008). Health 2.0 refers to promoting health with the use of mobile technologies, electronic databases, social networks' systems, telemedicine and the Internet as a communication link. In 2017 according to estimates of the European Commission 3.4 billion people owned some kind of mobile device which led to significant growth of searching information about health on-line (affecting about 50% of users according to the American Food and Drug Administration) (Department of Health and Human, 2015).

Health promotion requires governments to factor health implications into their decisions and support policies that prevent people from becoming ill (Bolotin & Bakayev, 2015). All government departments (especially a health department) must inform people about the necessity of living a healthy lifestyle, getting into good habits of working out and eating clean. In Poland a health department responsible for national health policy is called the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health's council has created the National Public Health Programme in which both challenges and strategic objectives for the Polish health care system have been presented. It is worth noting that in the National Public Health's programme media (including internet and social media) play special role in health education of society and their "...involvement is indispensable in today's world if one wants to inform the society effectively. In collaboration with the media, their local or country wide character must be taken into account, whereas the message needs to be tailored to the recipient" (National Health Programme for the years 2007-2015). One of the National Health Programme's goals was to develop infrastructure in order to implement health promotion related tasks. Thanks to EU's and Norway's grants the National Health Fund (NFZ) started a project called "NFZ's Health Academy" (Akademia Zdrowia NFZ) in order to improve the quality of management in Polish healthcare system and to increase the effectiveness of health promotion and education in Polish society. Through the years the project evolved from a basic e-learning tool with on-line courses and information for patients to a thriving web based education community expanding the reach of health education and promotion to cover many groups with different health-related issues.

Web based health education involves disseminating information to the public that educates people in order to enable pro-social behaviour change (Zuhdi & Sukarmin, 2021). With the availability of the Internet and restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic online health education can be used as one of few available tools to attract and engage the public on individual health issues. As health education is to shape health-conscious attitudes, identifying perceived benefits and possible outcomes of the national online health education (NFZ's Health Academy) is an important aspect to explore.

Material & methods

The main goal of the presented study was to analyse and describe informational and educational resources available on NFZ's Health Academy's website, YouTube channel and Facebook account. The main question was: "how does The National Health Fund (NFZ) promote healthy lifestyle and physical activity among Poles via webs and social media during the COVID-19 Pandemic?". The other questions were: "how does The National Health Fund communicate with their customers/patients via internet and social media?" ; "what is the quality of information offered by NFZ's Health Academy?" and "how significant are the informational and educational resources provided by the National Health Fund for the Poles?". The material for this analysis included feed from <https://akademia.nfz.gov.pl/>, <https://www.facebook.com/akademianfz>, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9Jc30vIzRL367GWhD9erVA> and Google Trends.

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. For the qualitative part, which made up most of the text, I chose the method of visual ethnography focused on analysing texts available on the forementioned sites and social media (Cichocki, Jędrkiewicz, Zydel 2012). According to Peräkylä (2009) "Internet is the site for textual communication that has in recent years expanded more than any other forum for the use of texts" and that is why during my research of digital content I used to "try to pin down their key themes and, thereby, to draw a picture of the presuppositions and meanings that constitute the cultural world of which the textual material is a specimen". Due to the huge amount of data contained on the NFZ's Health Academy's website/youtube channel/facebook account, when building the data corpus, I used the method of gradual detailing and reduction (top down approach). The starting point in this method is the "universe of possible texts", which is gradually narrowed down in the selection process, which results in a "specialized thematic diachronic corpus" that can be grasped by the researcher (Mautner 2011). For the quantitative part I used Google Trends' search engine – I typed the words "NFZ's Health Academy" in the search bar and analysed obtained results.

Results

The content of NFZ's Health Academy's website

The main website of NFZ's Health Academy is divided into two parts and you need to scroll down to see the bottom one. In the left corner there are logos of Health Academy, NFZ and Ministry of Health. The bookmarks for the page are placed on the bookmarks bar at the top of your site's window. The bookmarks will take you to links dedicated to different topics like: about us, Wednesdays with prophylaxis, POZ PLUS, diets, data on health and educational site. In the center of the site there is a huge banner with a slogan #szczepimy się (#get vaccinated for COVID-19). As my study's goal is to analyse the informational and educational content I

will not discover bookmarks tagged as “about us”, “POZ PLUS” and “data on health” for their aim is to inform society about Ministry of Health’s projects, contact health professionals or show some data related to medicine. In the bottom part of the main site there are icons linked to current topics like 8 weeks for health (an eight-week training to get fit), polypharmacy and materials about chronic kidney disease .

Once you go to the bookmarks and click the tab called “Wednesdays with prophylaxis” it will transfer you to the site dedicated to health promotion and health education initiatives. Every Wednesday local authorities in nutrition and physical activity run a healthy lifestyle service that can include free coaching, advice and support to help patients and customers find ways to move and eat healthy. There are also materials and interviews covering subjects of mental health, cancer, diabetes, lung and kidney diseases, blood donation, vaccines, addictions and many other health-related topics.

When you choose the bookmark “diet”, you can discover content related to diets and tips on how to eat healthily (see Figure 1.).NFZ’ Health Academy offers free e-books and films about prophylactic and therapeutic diet including recipes for easy meals and drinks. Once you register, you can also download meals plan for 28 days. You can also create shopping list and switch meals. The idea is to promote DASH diet that is supposed to lower your blood pressure.



Figure 1. The NFZ’s Health Academy’s site dedicated to diets and tips how to eat healthily.
(Source: <https://diety.nfz.gov.pl/local/diet/login.php>)

On educational site you can find e-learning courses covering subjects such as: prevention of health inequalities as part of public health policy, breastfeeding, basics of health promotion, tips on weaving exercise into your daily routine and dietary advice. However, the most interesting part of the website is associated with physical activity. Among numbers of useful materials there is the atlas of exercises for children and adolescents(see Figure 2.). This e-book contains a set of 40 exercises divided into coteries. The material also contains information on the benefits of physical activity, how to safely exercise, and the risks associated with excessive physical activity.

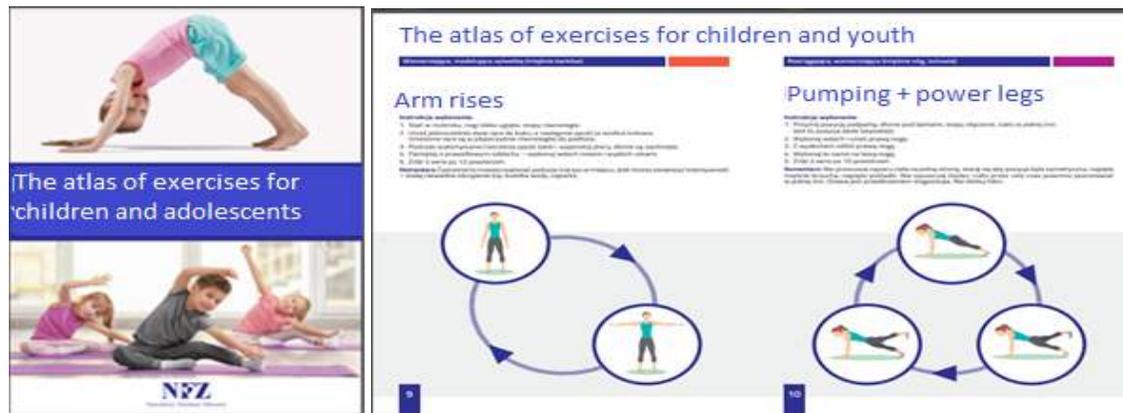


Figure 2. The atlas of exercises for children and adolescents. On the left you can see the cover of the book, on the right you can see the inside of the book with two examples of exercises: arm rises, pump and power legs.

(Source: <https://akademia.nfz.gov.pl/atlas-cwiczen-dla-dzieci-i-mlodziezy/>)

The forementioned set of exercises is designed for children and youth who do not experience any health issues but it is worth mentioning that NFZ’s Health Academy has also prepared films with sets of exercises for

people reporting back pain. There are several improvement plans in the fields of: hip pain syndromes, shoulder pain syndromes, pain syndromes of the lumbar region, thoracic segment's pain syndromes and cervical pain syndromes. Each plan is divided into three segments related to working with every field and there are three instructional video clips with physical exercises conducted by medical and other health care professionals (see Figure 3.)

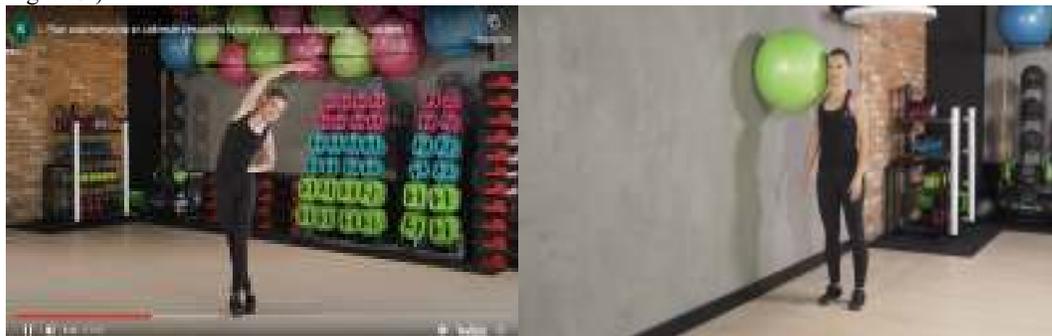


Figure 3. Excerpts from video clips of improvement plans in the fields of hip pain syndromes (on the left) and cervical pain syndromes (on the right).

(Source: <https://akademia.nfz.gov.pl/filmy/>)

The content of NFZ's Health Academy's YouTube account

NFZ's Health Academy's YouTube account has hit 6 400 subscriptions. There are 184 films covering topics of mental health, cancer, diabetes, diseases, blood donation, vaccines, addictions, COVID-19, health promotion and many other health-related themes on the channel.

During COVID-19 pandemic's outbreak one could observe the spread of materials on keeping social distance and staying safe but there were also many helpful tips on maintaining one's own health and well-being in challenging times. NFZ's Health Academy in association with a morning show program "Pytanie na śniadanie" ("Question for breakfast") aired on public tv a series of programmes called "Your home trainer" in which people in the time of lockdown could learn how to stay active at home. The series was also available on NFZ's Health Academy YouTube channel to help people join the movement in their free time in a confinement of their own apartments. The selection includes classes in stretching, resistance training, introduction to intervals, family training, strengthening training, motor coordination training, training on unstable ground, Tabata, dancing, training with slide or a stick. This fitness programme of free at home exercise should be achievable for beginners, seniors and children.

During the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic NFZ's Health Academy has created with trainers, a doctor, physiotherapist and psychologist a two-month training path to better health called "8 weeks to health" which is described on the channel as a complete preventive and training programme. The aim of the series is to get Poles moving, encourage regular physical activity and to show people how to exercise safely so that the results would be satisfactory. The idea of classes seems to be more mature than the idea of "Your home trainer" series and the training programme includes adaptation to training, building capacity, weight-bearing exercises, Tabata and intervals, improving muscle strength and HIT training. This fitness programme of free at home exercise classes seem to be cut out for intermediate/advance trainees.

The content of NFZ's Health Academy's YouTube account is diversified and there are video clips covering lots of topics such as self-massage. One can follow an instruction in the self-massage of the cervical spine or an instruction on self-massage in the painful shoulder syndrome and then learn how to massage the individual soft tissues and the muscles between each other in structural dependence to perform a full auto-massage session. You can also follow a channel dedicated for pregnant women with diabetes who would like to find out how to stay active and train safely during each trimester. The channel is a part of the project applying to the development of a mobile application for smartphones for women with gestational diabetes which is part of the PL07 Program, co-financed by the Bilateral Cooperation Fund of the EEA Financial Mechanism 2009-2014 and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism.

The content of NFZ's Health Academy's Facebook account

NFZ's Health Academy's Facebook account has hit 6 100 subscriptions. The channel is dedicated to patients, employees of entities of medical activity and all people who are close to the topic of health. On their website you can find diets, exercises, e-learning trainings, mobile applications, publications and many other materials related to health care and preventive care.

The basic goal of the NFZ Academy's Facebook team is to freely disseminate the knowledge in the field of broadly understood health protection. A lot of Facebook content is shared with both the NFZ's Health Academy's website and YouTube channel. However, Facebook profile seems to be the easiest and fastest way to connect with clients and patients, and one can find a lot of additional information on several topics related to physical activity and health.

During COVID-19 pandemic's first outbreak the main focus of NFZ's Health Academy's Facebook account was to popularize videos about psychological support during the epidemic. Later, the Facebook team

decided to diversify their content and include films and texts about the benefits of Nordic walking, fencing, cycling and interval training. Each week you could watch a video clip with professional sportsmen who would preach about their specialty and encourage viewers to get active (see Figure 4).

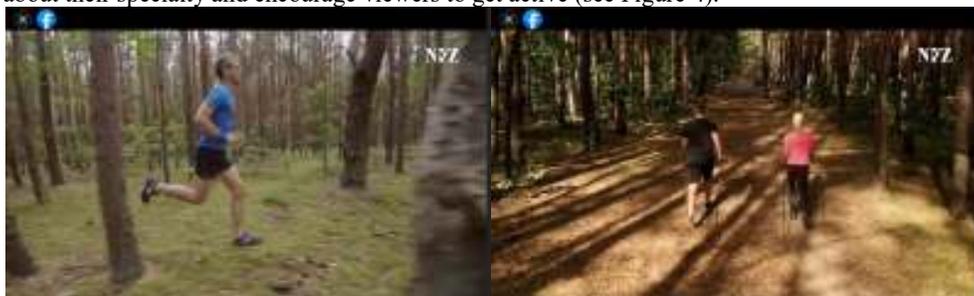


Figure 4. Video Clips of professionals training (on the left: interval training, on the right Nordic walking).
 (Source: <https://www.facebook.com/973054392756316/videos/3361427720611931>)

NFZ’s Health Academy in Google Trends

For the final part of my analysis I have decided to search for “NFZ’s Health Academy” in google trends in order to evaluate the significance of informational and educational resources provided by the National Health Fund (NFZ). It seems that Poles have been moderately interested in the topic of health education and promotion over the past year. However, I would like to emphasize the impact of NFZ’s Health Academy during the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020. If you look at the chart (see Chart 1.), you can tell that during the first lockdown Poles were frantically searching for information and the national media associated with health issues hit their record in google search.

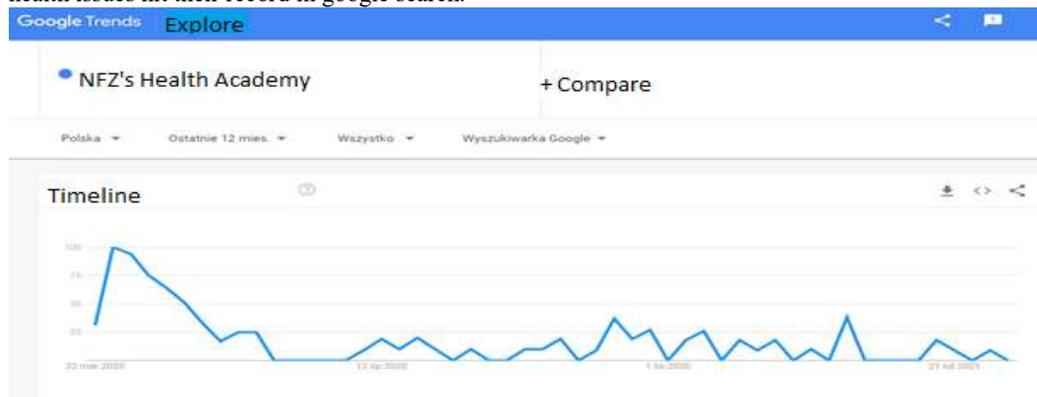


Chart 1. NFZ’s Health Academy in Google Trends form 22.03.2020 till 20.03.2021.

(Source: <https://trends.google.pl/trends/explore?q=Akademia%20NFZ&geo=PL>)

In the second chart (see Chart 2.) one can compare the level of interest in the content of NFZ’s Health Academy depending on the region of Poland. According to Google Trends’ statistics top five regions interested in searching for “NFZ’s Health” in google were: Zachodniopomorskie voivodeship, Podlaskie voivodeship, Pomorskie voivodeship, Mazowieckie voivodeship and Wamińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship. The even distribution among regions with various socioeconomic background is thought-provoking and this result should be researched in another study.

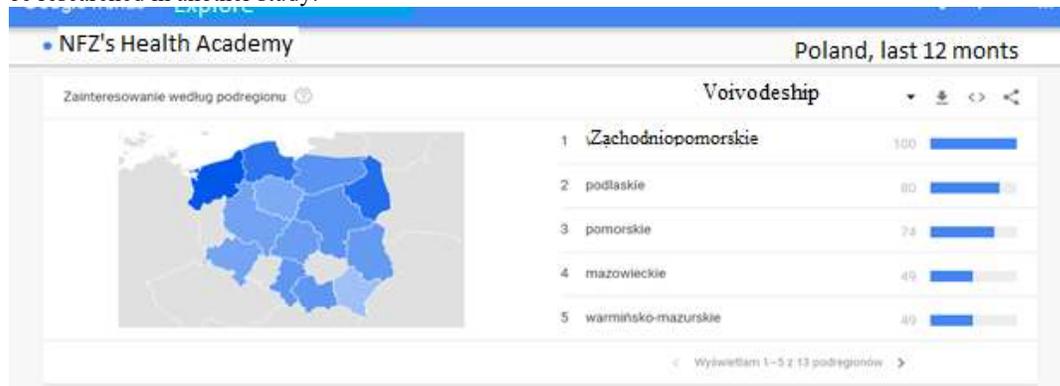


Chart 2. Comparison of the level of interest in the content of NFZ’s Health Academy depending on the region of Poland according to Google Trends.

(Source: <https://trends.google.pl/trends/explore?q=Akademia%20NFZ&geo=PL>)

Discussion

The results of the study show that, The National Health Fund (NFZ) promotes healthy lifestyle and physical activity among Poles via webs and social media during the COVID-19 pandemic in quite effective ways. There are multiple e-books, films, diet plans, interviews with medical and health care specialists, training programmes available on the website and social media accounts. The quality of information offered by NFZ's Health Academy compared to other free media is good and you can count on evidence-based health education and promotion. It is inspiring that during the outbreak of COVID-19 NFZ's Health Academy's team was able to connect with society and provide people with materials they could benefit from. It seems that the informational and educational resources provided by the National Health Fund for the Poles were mostly needed, especially in regions like Zachodniopomorskie voivodeship, Podlaskie voivodeship, Pomorskie voivodeship, Mazowieckie voivodeship and Wamińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship. In the field of communication with patients/customers the National Health Fund could use the potential of NFZ's Health Academy in better ways. Both the website and YouTube channel are based on a model of one-way communication where specialists lecture society but the customers cannot take part in a dialogue. The conducted analysis allows for the main conclusion that the use by customers from educational resources collected on NFZ's Health Academy media will bring you closer to the digital trends present in culture, but it will not trigger the process of change in health education and health promotion. However, the Facebook account seems to evolve into a more modern type of two-way communication venue. Hopefully, it is a sign of changing the model of communication between an institution and its customers.

Conclusions

The Internet has greatly improved access to health information for consumers. There is variation in how consumers seek information via the Internet and there is variation in quality and accessibility among Web sites. Digital exclusion is one of the most significant limitations of applying Web 2.0 tools for health purposes (Bujnowska-Fedak, 2015). The level of digitally excluded people in Poland is larger than the European average (Jedlińska, 2018). The fact that chronically ill people seem to use the Internet for health purposes the least frequently is highly disturbing. The studies of numerous health programmes in the field of oncology showed that mainly young people could benefit from these programmes, which leads to the conclusion that we still need to popularize access to online content and improve skills of older patients in using internet resources. In times of COVID-19 pandemic it is getting vital to use online tools to attract and engage the public on individual health issues and provide accurate health information and right design to the public, especially those who suffer from chronic diseases (Win, 2015).

Health information obtained from internet sources should always be put to the critical analysis. In the context of critical analysis, one must address the problem of Polish patients not consulting health-related information found in-line with any representative of the medical (Ulatowska-Szostak, 2009). The Internet can be used as the main or the first source of information (especially in the face of a difficult access to health care), but it should never be the sole source of information. Unfortunately, also almost half of respondents confirm that they never consult their on-line findings with health professionals (Ulatowska-Szostak, 2009). Therefore, every initiative supporting the development of so-called literacy in the field of eHealth literacy, like educating patients how to google the right questions, find reliable resources on the web and evaluate them for credibility (Norman, 2011) should be encouraged.

According to Raiola & Domenico (2021) "The data show a greater preference for activities aimed at well-being, less demanding than sports activities, for various reasons that can be motivational, logistical and organizational. In fact, more low-impact activities are chosen without the use of tools such as Pilates and yoga, followed by freebody activities, running and walking, finally, athletic training activities for competitive and non-competitive sportsmen and women cross training." The government's health-related agendas must encourage their society to search for alternative methods to outdoor training, independent training at home and online training. Feeding ready meal plans and training programmes through Internet seems to be an extremely important hack to maintain people's physical and mental health during lockdowns. However, it is important to reflect on what is the purpose of using online tools. The direction of digitization of health education disclosed in the study cannot stop on perpetuating one-way and unresponsive model of working with patients/customers. It is essential for NFZ's Health Academy's team to take next steps of integrating new technologies into existing practice of health promotion and education, and in the end, to be able to transform the model of classic education into a modern one.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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