General practitioners’ enrolment in research networks. A descriptive analysis, Belgium, January-July 2005
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Background:
Many European public health systems are implementing general practitioners’ (GPs) networks. Although more and more doctors have computer and use electronic patient records (EPR), for billing and scheduling, however, only a few use computer for clinical purposes and participate in a research network.
Our study explores why some doctors decide to take part to research network and how they make use of their electronic patient record.

Methods:
The experience of GPs with participation to research networks were investigated by an observational study using qualitative method. Data were collected by twelve face-to-face semi-structured interviews with GPs and two focus groups. Triangulation was maintained thanks to surveys data and observations data. The data were analyzed using open and axial coding, and credibility was maintained by the supervision of a multidisciplinary team.

Results:
The type of doctor-patient relationship as well as the type of use of EPR did influence the decision and the process of participation. The non-participants put the stress on the cognitive and moral aspects (lack of computer skills and fear of bad anonymization of the data), while the participants put the stress on collegial aspects of medical professionalism (improvement of the quality of medical care and better organisation of preventive actions). The type of EPR use and quality of data reflected the GPs expectations and not only the official purpose for which the network has been set up.

Conclusions:
Our study provides a comprehensive understanding of the process of participating in a research network. Public health networks of GPs should take into account professional issues in order to foster recruitment rate. Moreover, the participants to research networks may not be a random sample of the population of GPs.

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