Abstract:

Virtual communities can theoretically be described as a solution for meeting ubiquitous information and interaction needs. Such needs occur in healthcare, when for example freshly diagnosed cancer patients develop very strong information and interaction needs. But how can such a platform for cancer patients be designed, implemented and introduced practically? Investigating this lies at the heart of the COSMOS1-Project, parent project of the site www.krebsgemeinschaft.de. In order to understand cancer patients' situation we have conducted several field studies and have identified information and interaction needs. On this basis we have derived requirements for user centric socio technical system design for cancer patients. Since no existing offers in the European/non-English speaking internet have met these prerequisites we have started to develop and implement a virtual community for cancer patients. Hereby two topics are of special interest. First, how to systematically plan a community platform for this target group or in other words how a process model for the development and the introduction should look like and second, what specifications a possible technical infrastructure has to meet. For the
future subjects like ubiquitous community access, new possibilities of user identification and location related services are also of special interest since they might allow real anytime-anyplace access to the community platform or new, value-adding services to community members. But nevertheless: Only socially accepted, technically stable and economically feasible solutions can ensure sustainable success of (mobile) virtual healthcare communities.

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