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DOES INTERNET PROMOTE SELF-HARM BEHAVIOR?

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Introduction: Self-harm is a major public health problem, being a frequent condition among youth and young adults. Psychiatric conditions, like borderline personality, depression, substance misuse and anxiety disorders, are commonly associated with self-harm. The effects of media and contagion are also important and the internet has an important role in divulging and sharing self-harm behaviors.
Aims: We pretend to study the role the internet in potentiating or preventing self-harm behaviors.
Methods: We used combined literature searches in PubMed and B-on using the terms “self-harm”, “self injury”, “self mutilation” and “internet” and we also present a clinical case from our service.
Results: Most of the individuals that have self-harm behaviors may never present in psychiatric ward. Today, there is more information about self-harm available to the public domain than ever and web sites about self-harm include personal pages, forums, blogs, communities and even video-sharing sites. These web sites have supportive content that allow the users feeling that they are not alone, sharing feelings and narratives. However, most of them have potentially harmful material, including self-injury related tips, reinforcing messages and triggering material, normalizing or even glamorizing self-injury.
Conclusions: Most of the websites normalize and promote self-harm behaviors. Only the better knowledge of these phenomena would allow the use of internet as an effective tool for self-harm prevention, especially for socially-isolated and vulnerable individuals.

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