



Service Priorities and Programmes Electronic Presentations

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An Analysis of the Quality of Information available on the Internet - Low Back Pain

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Introduction

The Internet is an established source of health information widely used by patients to learn about their condition and its possible management options. Due to uncertain reliability of the content, the quality of the information accessible to a typical patient via the Internet needs to be assessed.

Objectives

To identify the keywords most frequently searched by the low back pain patients and to evaluate the quality of information of the interventions of low back pain on the Internet.

Methodology

20 patients with low back pain, were surveyed about the keywords recently used to search about their condition on the Internet. After identifying the keywords, an Internet search with the mostly used keyword was performed using popular search engines Google and Yahoo!. The first 10 websites were located by each search engine, thus initially 20 websites were identified. After screening out irrelevant and overlapping websites, and with a list of criteria for assessing eligibility, the included websites were analyzed in detail finally. Interventions suggested by the websites were evaluated based on "An updated overview of clinical guideline for chronic low back pain management in primary care" (2012), which make a recommendation regarding clinical use of the intervention as "Do", "Might Do", "Don't Do" and "Don't Know".

Result

With 20 patients surveyed, the mostly searched keyword was '腰背痛'. 15 websites were included finally after 5 were excluded. Among the interventions suggested by the 15 included websites, self-care education, therapeutic exercises and multidisciplinary programs were recommended as "Do" (10.5%) whereas

other various interventions were recommended as “Might Do” (41.5%) for clinical use. In contrast, interventions lacking supportive evidence (48%) were concluded as “Don’ t Do” (23.6%) and “Don’ t Know” (24.4%), which were not recommended to be used clinically. Though being proven ineffective, these interventions were promoted by some commercial websites. This study highlighted the variance of information about intervention for low back pain and identified the disparity between the information available to typical Internet users and evidence-based information. Patients may not be able to scrutinize the quality of the information available. Healthcare professionals must have a role in evaluating existing information in Websites as to provide good-quality evidence-based knowledge to fill the information gap for patient’s perspective.