

Evaluation of online information for potential living kidney donors

Bottom line: Nine websites (out of 86 studied) identified to have the highest coverage and accuracy of information, though reading level for public comprehension was higher than recommended.

Focused question:

How useful are the findings of this paper for recommending websites for a clinician to use with patients and patients' families?

Citation

Improving on-line information for potential living kidney donors

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Kidney International (2007) 71, 1062–1070

Search terms – searching within the journal Kidney International using the term 'information'

Summary of aims and methods of study

- To conduct a detailed rigorous assessment of websites on living kidney donation
- Identification of potential websites by three separate key word searches on Google, Yahoo and WebMD respectively using the terms 'living kidney donation', 'live kidney donor' and 'kidney donor'
- The first 50 websites from the nine searches were selected and after removing duplicates and excluding ineligible websites 86 websites were reviewed
- Use of the DISCERN survey to assess general quality of medical information on each website
- Use of Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score for readability assessment
- Development of a specific checklist of topics about living kidney donation from a review of evidence-based material and consensus statements outlining the information that should be disclosed to potential living kidney donors to help in their decision making. This recommended checklist of 63 items was also reviewed by 10 different health care providers involved in the care of living kidney donors.
- Two reviewers independently abstracted all data from the websites and disagreements resolved by consensus.

Results

- On average, websites covered 24 of the recommended 63 items (38%)
- The least covered topics were donor benefits and the voluntary nature of donation
- No association found between link popularity ranking and level of coverage
- The content presented on the sites was 88-100% accurate
- Almost all sites (98%) were written above the recommended reading level for public consumption – as this was a Canadian study, this level was US fifth grade

- The overall mean DISCERN score for all sites was 3 out a possible 5
- Only half the websites listed contradictions that may prevent a potential donor from donating, with diabetes being the reason most often stated
- The sites varied considerably in their discussion of living donors' short and long term medical risks
- Only 34 out of 86 websites stressed importance of donors receiving post transplant follow up care.

Comments

- The reviewers used established evaluation tools – DISCERN and the Flesch-Kincaid readability score
- The recommended checklist of information about living kidney donation could have been derived from guidelines
- There was no bias declared or possible bias detected, although authors were from the Donor Nephrectomy Outcomes Research Network
- As the websites would be written by clinicians it was not surprising that the reading level was quite high
- The paper did point out the weaknesses of online information sources
- A sample of web users from the general public could have been used in the study to conduct the searches for websites, as a comparison with the researchers' search results
- The word 'transplant' might have been used by the general public searching for information on donating a kidney
- The split in Table 2 between amount of coverage and accuracy could have been laid out better
- The article title should have been 'assessment' of online information rather than 'improving' online information
- It would be difficult to transfer the research findings to another topic as it was very topic dependent, although the methodology was sound and could be used for looking at web-based information on other clinical conditions.

Journal Club's conclusion

- The group thought that the paper would be useful to refer to in recommending websites to a clinician
- The paper's findings were valuable in that they analysed the specific weaknesses of online information on living kidney donation which could then be addressed by the clinician in a face-to-face setting.

Appraised by: Oxfordshire Health librarians Journal Club, November 2008.