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Patient Education Level and Utilization of Internet Resources by Patients in Orthopedic Hip and Knee Consultations

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Internet has become an increasingly popular source of reference for patients to learn about their medical problems. It is easily accessible, and a large number of uncensored information is available online written from various sources and perspectives. However, the role of internet and its impact on patient's care and understanding of the disease remains unclear. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the role and effect of internet use for patients seeking consultation for hip and knee arthritis. More specifically, the relationship between patient's education level, internet use, motives for doing background readings, perception of internet information, and reactions to the available information will be studied. **Method:** Patients seeking orthopaedic consultation for knee or hip arthritis at the Toronto Western Hospital were identified and invited to fill out a questionnaire on their first visit. The questionnaire was designed to assess the patients' pre-consultation reading habits, their use of internet, and their reaction to what they have read on the internet. The questionnaire also included questions about the respondent's background. **Results:** In comparing patients holding college/university degree (CU) with patients having no college/university education (NoCU), the CU group were associated with increased internet use (CU vs. NoCU: 71.0% vs. 48.3%; $p < 0.01$) and background reading (CU vs. NoCU: 82.2% vs. 17.8%; $p < 0.001$) prior to consultation; fewer incidence of anxiety following internet use (CU vs. NoCU: 29.9% vs. 53.6%; $p < 0.05$); and higher rates of decisions influenced by internet use (CU vs. NoCU: 20.8% vs. 3.6%, $p < 0.05$). Internet users demonstrated a higher confidence in gathering and understanding medical information (Internet users vs. non-internet users: 6.59 ± 2.05 vs. 5.03 ± 2.78 ; $p < 0.001$) and rated the accuracy of information on internet at 7.18 ± 2.01 (max = 10). **Conclusion:** Internet use can influence patient's treatment decision, anxiety level, and understanding of their disease. Caregivers must recognize the growing trend of internet use and should counsel and educate their patients appropriately based on what they have read to help them accurately appreciate the nature of their disease.

KEYWORDS

Patient Education; Internet Use; Orthopedic Hip; Knee Consultations

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