

ASSESSMENT OF INTERNET-BASED INFORMATION REGARDING URINARY INCONTINENCE

Hypothesis / aims of study

Patients gain knowledge regarding their pelvic floor health through the Internet. Currently, there is a paucity of data relating Internet education and pelvic floor health, including the accuracy of available sources of information. The objective of the current study is to establish descriptive data on the content, accuracy, and relevance of Internet-based information regarding urinary incontinence.

Study design, materials and methods

Using the search term, "urinary incontinence" the first twenty websites that appeared in each of three highly utilized search engines (google.com, ask.com, yahoo.com) were identified. Two reviewers evaluated each site for content, relevance, and accuracy. Reviewers determined if the website presented the definition, cause, evaluation, and/or treatment of urinary incontinence and each website was evaluated for relevance and accuracy on a modified 4-point Likert scale. Chi-squared and Fisher's exact tests were used where appropriate.

Results

Fifty-one unique sites were identified: Government-, university-, and/or society-sponsored sites represented 23.5% of the identified sites with the other 76.5% sponsored by industry, private, and/or community entities. The site year of origin could not be determined in 61%, although 78% of the sites contained a year of update. Thirty-five percent of sites were rated as mostly/completely relevant to the search term and 45.1% of sites were rated as very/completely accurate. Government-, university-, and/or society-sponsored sites were significantly more likely to include the definition, evaluation, and all forms of treatment of urinary incontinence compared to sites with other sponsors ($p \leq .02$). Additionally there was a statistical trend toward higher relevance and accuracy among government-, university-, and/or society-sponsored sites ($p = .08$).

Interpretation of results

Few websites identified with use of the search term, "urinary incontinence" report the time of origin of the information they contain. However many report when the information was updated. Less than half of the websites contain information deemed relevant to the search term or contain accurate information. Institutions recognized for expertise in the area of health care sponsor a minority of websites but provide more comprehensive information that is potentially more relevant and accurate to the topic of urinary incontinence.

Concluding message

At this time patients may be directed to government-, university-, and/or society-sponsored sites to obtain comprehensive and reliable information. The International Continence Society's website is not identified by the methodology used in this study.

References

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