ACCURACY AND READABILITY OF CONSUMER ORIENTED HEALTH INFORMATION WEBSITES FOR PREGNANT MOTHERS WITH BREAST CANCER

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Purpose: Currently, there is an increase in the use of the World Wide Web to find information about new medical diagnoses. However, there is no literature about the quality and readability of websites that present information about cancer during pregnancy. This specific topic is important in that pregnancy is always a very crucial time in a woman's life and a childbearing mother must fight a deadly disease while also nurturing a growing baby. The purpose of this study is to evaluate and analyze consumer oriented health information websites regarding breast cancer during pregnancy for accuracy and readability. The primary goal of the study is to identify the websites that best present cancer information for pregnant women with breast cancer in an accurate and readable way. Secondary goals include identifying the specific accuracy assessment items that were and were not covered by most websites, as well as the websites that presented the information at the most readable level for individuals.

Methods: Using the World Wide Web, the first forty websites from Google, Yahoo, and Bing, with the search term of "pregnancy" with "breast cancer", were evaluated. Links to blogs and personal testimonies; scientific literature; duplicate websites; and news stories were excluded from the sample. Each website was evaluated for accuracy of information related to breast cancer during pregnancy, as assessed through an Accuracy Assessment created for the study. Accuracy was also determined by using a website called Health on the Net (HON). Website URLs were entered into the search engine located on the Health on the Net Foundation website to see if the website was included in the HON database. Readability of each website was determined by the Flesch- Kincaid Grade Level Score.

Findings: Twenty-nine websites met the inclusion criteria for the study. Of those, only nine were HON certified. As for accuracy, the average number of accurate items that were located on the twenty-nine webpages included in the study was 7.379 out of a total of 20 items.
The most identified item for accuracy was related to chemotherapy during the first trimester, which was mentioned on twenty-four websites. There were five items infrequently covered. The average readability for the sample was a seventh grade reading level, with eight websites having a reading level no higher than fifth grade. The most accurate website was www.cancer.org/cancer/breastcancer/moreinformation/pregnancy-and-breast-cancer.

Conclusions: Consumer oriented health information websites for this high-risk population are frequently incomplete, inaccurate, or are not at the correct grade level for individuals with limited literacy. It is important for health care professionals to educate patients on ways to find reliable websites and refer them to appropriate websites that are accurate and readable.