Are the Needs of Fertility Patients’ Met by Information Found Online?
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INTRODUCTION

- It is estimated that 70% of adults use the Internet as a primary source of health information, with higher rates among those with health problems.
- Fertility patients are likely to search online for fertility information and support.
- Few studies have investigated the online search patterns of fertility patients and have evaluated the ability of the information to meet patients’ needs.

Objectives

1. To investigate whether online information about fertility met patients’ needs.
2. To characterize the demographic profiles and search patterns of patients whose needs were not met by online resources.

METHODS

- Patients were recruited in 4 clinics in Montreal and Toronto, Canada.
- A total of 254 male and 313 female fertility patients answered an anonymous online needs assessment survey.
- Questions about online searching included:
  - “Have you searched online for information about infertility?”
  - “Did you look online for the following types of information?”
- Medical information about fertility (causes, diagnostic tests, scientific literature, etc.), information about clinics and medical teams, treatment options for infertility, information on coverage and support from others.
- “In general, did the information you found online meet your needs?”
- Patients also reported:
  - Demographic characteristics and fertility history
  - Perceived stress using the Perceived Stress Scale 4 (PSS-4)
  - Responses from 0 (“never”) to 4 (“very often”)
  - Total score between 0 and 16
  - Depressive symptomatology using the Patient Health Questionnaire 2 (PHQ-2)
  - Responses from 0 (“not at all”) to 3 (“nearly every day”)
  - Total score between 0 and 6
  - Cut-off of 2 warrants further clinical investigation for depression

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics (n = 567)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>n (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>254 (44.8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>313 (55.2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annual Household Income (CAD)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Below $60,000</td>
<td>260 (47.9)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Above $60,000</td>
<td>283 (52.1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education (highest level achieved)</td>
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<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>47 (8.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical college</td>
<td>99 (18.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>263 (47.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post graduate degree</td>
<td>141 (25.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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- Patients whose needs were not met were less likely to have searched for certain types of information compared to patients whose needs were met.

Types of information searched online

Patients whose needs were not met were less likely to have searched for certain types of information compared to patients whose needs were met.

CONCLUSION

- Fertility patients commonly refer to online resources to access information about fertility. However, these findings indicate that information and support resources available online did not meet the needs of almost 30% of patients.
- Patients with unmet needs searched less for: medical information about diagnosis and treatments and proactive social support resources. Fear of disclosure may discourage patients from seeking opportunities to discuss infertility with others.
- Importantly, patients who were stressed or depressed had unmet needs for information and support, suggesting that online resources may not be tailored to the needs of distressed patients. There is a need for more individualization of online resources to ensure that it is accessible, targeted and sensitive to patients’ needs.

88% of patients searched online for information about fertility

Of those who searched online:

- 71% indicated that their needs were met by online information
- 29% indicated that their needs were not met by online information

Fertility patients commonly refer to online resources to access information about fertility.