Gap Analysis of Drug Information on websites available to American Consumers

Vani Kumaran, PharmD1, Edmund Arthur, PharmD1, Richa Shah3, Lindsay Brust-Sisti, PharmD,BCPS2

1Rutgers Institute for Pharmaceutical Industry Fellowships; 2Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy, Rutgers University, Piscataway, NJ, USA; 3Philadelphia College of Pharmacy, University of the Sciences, Pennsylvania

Background

> Since the late 1990s, the trend of consumer-driven access to health information has been cited in several publications.
> > More than 70,000 websites disseminate health information; in excess of 50 million people seek health information online.
> > Recent publications have document that the majority of the data on these websites is not the approved package insert of a drug.

Objective

Provide a preliminary comparison of content available on different drug information websites as it relates to the approved package insert and to identify gaps across these resources

Methods

Four drug information websites were identified from a web search in the Google search engine:

1. Wikipedia, WebMD, Medline and Drugs.com
2. Drug information on these websites was compared against the information presented in the FDA approved package insert of a sample of 25 drugs.
3. Drugs selected for the data collection process were derived from an IMS Health national prescription audit report conducted between April 2013 and March 2014. The audit organized the top 100 medications by total prescriptions in the United States.
4. Content analysis was performed by comparing and documenting whether information presented by category in the package insert was also present on each of these respective websites for each drug in the sample selected.

Results

> When comparing data from the 4 websites, the results show 100% of the sample content was available on Drugs.com in all criteria and on WebMD and Medline in 12 of 15 criteria.
> > This indicated that they were the most comprehensive and consistent with the package insert.
> > Drug information was available on all websites for the selected sample of 25 drugs with the exception of Suboxone missing in WebMD’s database.

Limitations

> Representative sample of drugs may not accurately reflect all information available on the websites.
> > Some drug information content may have been overlooked or misinterpreted.

Conclusions

This study was used to identify the degree of detail of drug information available on websites which patients have access to view and obtain information.

In using the package insert as a benchmark, the methods allow preliminary study of four frequently visited sites that appear when one searches for a drug.

The representative sample provided insight on what type of information a consumer sees when they want to understand more about a potential new prescription or existing medication they may be taking.

The results demonstrate that WebMD, Medline, and Drugs.com are the “most comprehensive” of the four that were evaluated.

Future implications may be to apply standardization practices for drug information available publicly on the internet.

References


Author Contact Information

Vani Kumaran, PharmD - vani.kumaran@pfizer.com
Edmund Arthur, PharmD - edmund.arthur@pfizer.com
Richa Shah - rshah1328@uconn.edu
Lindsay Brust-Sisti - brustsisti@pharmacy.rutgers.edu

Disclosure

Three authors are affiliated with Rutgers University Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy and are paid employees of the University. The author is affiliated with Philadelphia College of Pharmacy.