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SUFE and the Internet: Are Healthcare Information Websites Accessible to Parents?

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Background: Slipped upper femoral epiphysis is an adolescent hip disorder requiring rapid surgical intervention. Faced with the prospect of their child undergoing surgery, many fearful parents will turn to the internet to provide information and reassurance. Previous studies have shown the orthopaedic information can be difficult to comprehend.

Objective: Assess the readability of healthcare websites regarding Slipped **Upper Femoral Epiphysis** **Methods:** The term Slipped Upper Femoral Epiphysis was searched in Google, Bing and Yahoo. The websites were evaluated using readability software with seven specialised readability tests including the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Grade Level, the Flesch Reading Ease Score, the Simple Measure of **Gobbledygook**, Coleman-Liau Index, Automated Readability Index and the Gunning Fog Index. The Reading Grade Level was also calculated.

A Flesch Read Ease Score (FRES) score above 65 and a Reading Grade Level (RGL) of sixth grade and under was considered acceptable. Websites were also assessed for translation services.

Results: 21 unique websites were assessed. The average FRES was 52.5 +/- 15.4. Only 3 websites scored 65 or higher (14%). There was a statistically significant difference between website scores based on affiliation, with physician websites having the overall highest mean (P=0.004).

The average RGL was 8.67 +/- 1.8. Only two websites met the accepted RGL criteria (9.5%) while five websites were marked as extremely difficult to understand (23.8%). Only five websites offered translations (23.8%). There was no statistically significant difference in readability scores between websites which offered translation and those which did not.

One-way t-tests showed that both the RGL (p<0.001; CI: 1.83-3.49) and the FRES (P<0.001, CI: -19.4 to -5.4) scores were significantly different from the accepted standard.

Conclusion: Most websites reviewed were above the recommended Reading Grade Level, making content inaccessible. Improving readability and translation services would enhance the internet's usability as a healthcare tool for parents.

Biography

Dr Andrea Mc Carthy is an orthopaedic surgical trainee and part of the Royal College of Surgeons training scheme. She has published more than 10 papers and has a special interest in the communication and medical education of patients.

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