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Analysis of queries on Polish Internet forums about pregnancy

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1 Background

Internet access and usage is almost ubiquitous, providing new opportunities and increasing challenges for healthcare practitioners and users. With pregnant women frequently turning to the Internet and smartphone applications for information during pregnancy, a better understanding of this behaviour is needed. The interactive websites, where parents quickly at any time of the day and night can get experience-based information from many people in situations similar to their own, are valued by many parents on the Internet. This is evidenced by the steadily increasing number of visits to parental websites. It is possible to see a similar development worldwide. However, that online information is not controlled.

2 Objective

The objectives were to describe Polish online pregnancy and pregnancy-related internet forums and evaluate the quality and reliability of information shared by internet users.

3 Methods

The descriptive study was performed in March 2018. In order to identify pregnancy-related forum websites, we used two keywords: forum and pregnancy. We explored the first ten websites from the search result. Each website was evaluated for all the queries starting with the phrases “what is” and “what does it mean”.

4 Results

We identified 88 phrases posted by pregnant Internet users in Polish forums. Phrases raising questions were mostly: “Doppler flow”, “genetic ultrasound”, “blighted ovum” and “GBS”. All of the search results we divided into 8 categories: ultrasound, laboratory findings, microorganisms, procedures, labour, fetal pathologies, maternal diseases and other. The laboratory findings category amounted to 19 (22,6%), the ultrasound to 18 (20,5%), the fetal pathologies to 15 (17%), the maternal diseases to 13 (14,8%), the microorganisms to 11 (12,5%), the other to 6 (6,8%), the procedures to 4 (4,5%) and the labour to 2 (2,3%) of all of the search results respectively. Moreover, 14 results otherwise classified may fall into the ultrasound category increasing its prevalence to 32 (36,4%). 24 (27,3%) queries were abbreviations.

5 Conclusion

The Internet is a widely used information source. Further studies are needed to evaluate the reliability of information shared by pregnant women on the Internet forums. The majority of queries posted on pregnancy-related websites concern diagnostic tests ordered during prenatal visits. It may show a need for an obstetrician to give future mothers more detailed description of abbreviations, lab work results and sonography.