Information Seeking Behavior of Providers in Surgical Specialties at a Community Academic Medical Center

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Information Seeking Behavior of Providers in Surgical Specialties at a Community Academic Medical Center

Lehigh Valley Health Network, Allentown, PA

Introduction

• By 2020 medical knowledge is expected to double every 73 days.
• 41% of surgical patients use the internet to search for medical information, and
  – One study showed up to 60% of patients don’t share this search with their medical providers.
• With more informed patients, more information to learn, and less time, it is important for surgical providers to find and assess quality resources that are easily accessible and effectively communicate their findings with patients.

Problem Statement

This study aims to evaluate how providers in surgical specialties at an academic community hospital respond to questions from patients, how they search for information themselves, and how they assess the quality of the information they find.

Methodology

• IRB approved, educational grant funded prospective project.
• Scripted interview using previously validated methodology.
• Refer to Appendix 1 for a list of asked questions.
• Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Results

An interim, single coded analysis of answers from 24 surgical providers across 12 specialties at LVHN was collected, with demographics shown in Table 1. Providers saw an average of 218 patients per month (range 30-600), and an average of 16% brought along searched information (range 1%-50%). Charts 1 - 3 display information regarding patient questions. Chart 4 shares how providers search for information, and Chart 5 reveals how they assess the credibility of the information they find.

Conclusions/Future Implications

Surgical providers at LVHN are mainly supportive when patients bring along searched information, though the frequency can vary widely. Not surprising, the most common questions were about treatment or procedures. Providers most commonly started with a generic online search when looking for information, and many used a combination of the resources provided by their professional society (journals, conferences, websites, colleagues). Surgical specialties are unique fields in that a large portion of their knowledge is procedural and likely to be learned at conferences and in collaboration with colleagues, rather than in textbooks. It was common to evaluate a study to determine its reliability, but the reputation of the journal, organization, or author appeared to be more important to surgical providers at LVHN.