

What Answers does the Internet Provide for Patients in Ireland with Questions about Generic Medicines?



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ABSTRACT

Use of generic medicines in Ireland has historically been low. New legislation, in 2013, introduced reference pricing and generic substitution in Ireland for the first time. Also, as patents have recently expired for many familiar medicines, Irish patients are more likely than ever to receive a generic medicine.

As the Internet is a primary source of information for patients seeking information on healthcare matters, this study aims to assess, in terms of quality and accessibility, information on generic medicines that a searcher in Ireland is likely to find online.

Internet searches were completed using a computer with an Irish Internet Protocol address. Search results were evaluated with respect to quality of information, using a newly developed Website Quality Assessment tool, and for readability, using existing methods. The reproducibility of the tools was assessed, and correlations between Website Quality Assessment score, readability statistics and Google search engine results page ranking were determined.

This novel and topical evaluation showed that, of the websites most likely to be seen by a searcher, none demonstrated the desired combination of scoring highly for both quality of information and readability.

Patient education is a key factor in implementation of the changes planned in the Irish healthcare system. There is a gap in online knowledge provision in Ireland, which, if filled by a website designed using the Website Quality Assessment tool developed in this study, can correct this deficit by providing accessible, high-quality information.

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SOURCE

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