

Academic websites offer the most reliable pediatric orthopedic information online

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Most parents frequently rely on the Internet for pediatric health information, and yet the content and quality of information can vary greatly from website to website. According to new research presented on Sunday, Oct. 21 at the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) National Conference and Exhibition in New Orleans, websites provided by academic institutions offer the most reliable pediatric health information, and commercial-sponsored websites, the least. In general, disease summary and diagnosis information is more likely to be correct on the Internet than information about the cause and prognosis for a disease.

In the abstract, "Quality of Pediatric Orthopedic Information on the Internet," researchers identified 10 common pediatric orthopedic conditions based on admissions to a children's hospital: brachial plexus injury, cerebral palsy, clubfoot, developmental dysplasia of the hip, leg length discrepancy, osteochondroma, polydactyly, [scoliosis](#), spina bifida and syndactyly. They then used the two most frequently utilized [Internet search engines](#) to identify the top 10 websites for each disease.

A total of 98 websites – 33 academic, 30 commercial, 31 nonprofit, and four physician-operated – were judged based on Health On the Net Foundation (HON) criteria. Custom, content-based grading sheets were used to assess whether the website provided essential information for each disease, including a summary of the disease or injury/condition, cause, diagnosis, treatment and prognosis. In addition, each website received independent quality and content scores from three [orthopedic](#)

[surgeons.](#)

"We found the overall quality of information on the websites to be poor," said study author Andrea Bauer, MD. "Broad, non-specific information quality was the best, such as an overview of a diagnosis, while more specific information about prognosis and long-term effects was the worst."

The content of each website was scored out of a possible 100 points. Overall, academic websites had the highest content score (mean: 60.8 ± 15.5), followed by physician (57 ± 18), non profit (54.2 ± 20.2) and commercial (46.7 ± 22.2). Among the disease/condition-specific information, osteochondroma websites had the highest content scores (mean: 75.8 ± 11.8), and those on leg length discrepancy had the lowest (39.5 ± 16.5).

"Also interesting – we found a lot of overlap of information among different websites, such as text, photos and diagrams that appeared to be directly copied from one [website](#) to another," said Dr. Bauer. "This could be very misleading for patients if the information is incorrect, as was often the case."

To minimize the effects of incorrect or misleading information on the Internet, "we advise physicians to talk with their patients about the [information](#) they get on the Internet and how it affects their understanding of their condition as well as their expectations," said Dr. Bauer.

Provided by American Academy of Pediatrics

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