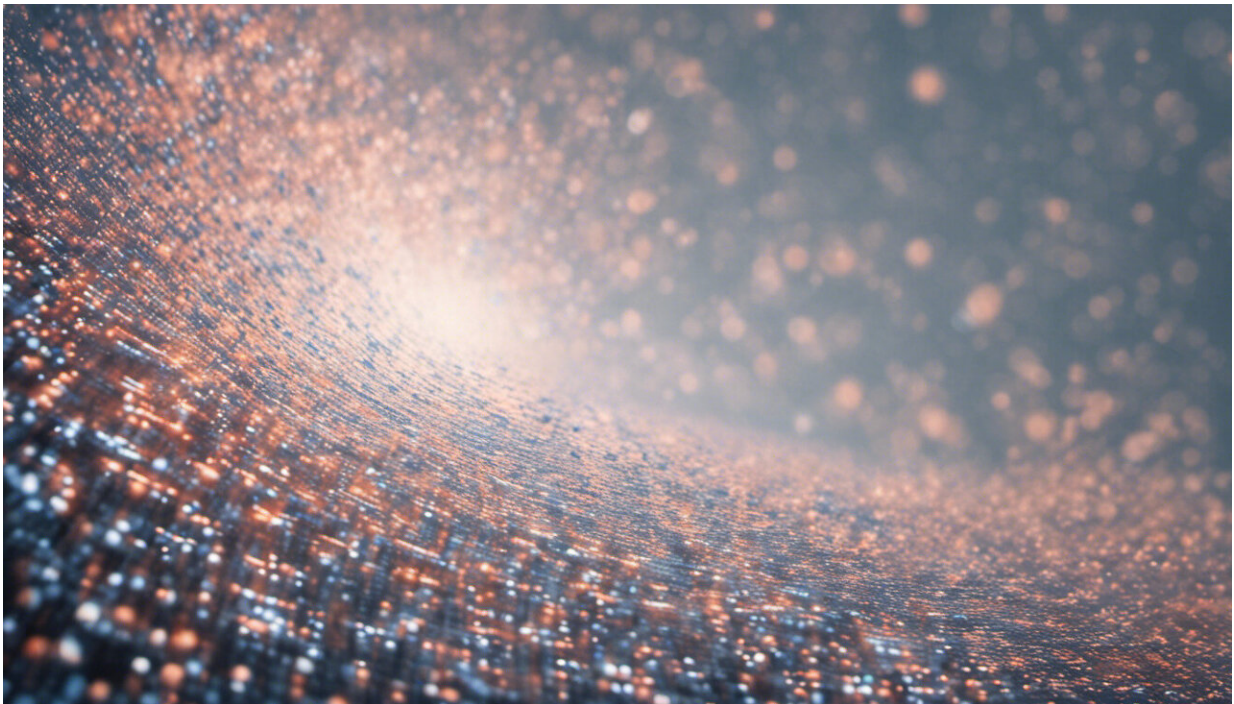


Researchers review help for navigating 'Dr Google'

July 31 2014, by Rebecca Graham



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

With the onset of the digital age more and more people are turning to 'Dr Google' for health and medical information, however local researchers are worried about a lack of resources for helping consumers find reliable health information online.

Curtin University School of Pharmacy PhD candidate Kenneth Lee—whose review paper was recently published in *PLoS ONE*—says it is important to guide consumers to find appropriate online resources given not only our reliance on the internet, but also in the prevalence of self-management of chronic diseases.

This is in light of previous literature that suggests many consumers' health literacy, or their capacity to locate, comprehend, evaluate and use [health information](#), is limited.

Limited health literacy, combined with poor technological literacy in navigating the internet, can make the task of finding reputable online sources of health information particularly difficult.

"Our focus was to investigate what's been done to help consumers ... whether this be through face-to-face education or some online intervention ... and to explore whether there is scope for other interventions," Mr Lee says.

The researchers assessed existing intervention programs and their impact through an extensive search of medical and health databases and 'grey literature' search engines.

"The studies we found reported an overall improvement in people's ability to identify quality online information and to navigate various websites," Mr Lee says.

"The change in behaviour was positive overall and was either a change in the way participants searched for health information, or their perceptions about being able to better manage their health."

"However, this review really highlights the fact that there aren't many interventions aimed at assisting health consumers to find relevant and

reliable online health information."

From the 707 records initially identified, 27 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility, of which nine studies met the criteria for inclusion.

The most common approach in the seven published studies involved interactive workshops on how to judge the reliability and credibility of health websites.

Other interventions included a health literacy curriculum delivered in schools, and an online portal with modules on self-management, health education and social networking.

Interventions reported in the grey literature aimed to facilitate access to print, electronic and online health information, resources and services.

Mr Lee suggests future research could explore different learning frameworks to improve online [health](#) literacy and improve transparency in the labelling of trustworthy websites.

More information: Lee K, Hoti K, Hughes JD, Emmerton LM (2014) "Interventions to Assist Health Consumers to Find Reliable Online Health Information: A Comprehensive Review." *PLoS ONE* 9(4): e94186. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0094186](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0094186)

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