

Products advertised on personalized cancer care websites: True or false claims?

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Although there are only a few validated genetic tests specifying individual risks for certain cancers or which can help to select genomically targeted cancer therapies, the Internet is already a major source of marketing for both legitimate tests as well as those of dubious value, according to a study published March 5 in the *JNCI: Journal of the National Cancer Institute*.

Stacy W. Gray, M.D., A.M., of the Center for Population Sciences, Department of Medical Oncology, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Katherine Janeway, M.D., of the Department of Pediatric Oncology at the Dana-Farber/Boston Children's Cancer and Blood Disorders Center, Boston, MA, and colleagues analyzed the information on 55 Internet websites sponsored by commercial enterprises, academic institutions, physicians, research institutes, and organizations marketing personalized [cancer](#) medicine (PCM). The authors defined PCM as "...products or services that could be used to tailor, personalize, or individualize care based on genomic or tumor-derived data."

The authors coded the websites according to the types of products offered and the type and quality of information given about the products. Their analyses of each website were then reviewed by expert panels to determine whether the tests offered were standard or nonstandard, based on published evidence of clinical utility. Websites offered both somatic (non-inherited) and germline (inherited) genetic tests. Of those offering somatic tests, only a few marketed tests validated by research (such as testing for mutations in the epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR) in

[lung cancer patients](#)) whereas 88% marketed nonstandard and unvalidated tests. In addition, 85% of the websites included information on the benefits of their products or services but only 27% included information on the limitations of their products. About half of the commercial websites included the cost of testing, which ranged from \$99 to \$13,000.

The researchers conclude that although online marketing may improve access to testing, "...the vast majority of companies that market somatic tests online promote tests that do not have evidence of clinical utility."

More information: Marketing of Personalized Cancer Care on the Web: an Analysis of Internet Websites, [DOI: 10.1093/jnci/djv030](#)

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