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TITLE

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTHCARE IN THE DIGITAL AGE: HOW ONLINE HEALTHCARE INFORMATION BOTH SHAPES AND RESPONDS TO PATIENT EXPECTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Context: The Internet has revolutionized healthcare by providing unprecedented information and power to patients.

Objective: What does the Internet reveal about what patients really want? And how can providers both shape and meet their expectations? Patients in the Information Age have become empowered to independently make care decisions and chart courses of treatment. One by-product is fresh insights into patient wants and needs, expressed in social media and Internet searches.

Methods: Through social media, patients are able to converse about care globally. Using specially developed software, researchers at Vanguard Communications have studied and classified tens of thousands of comments about physicians, clinics and hospitals. Additionally, analysis of Google data has further uncovered trends in patients' expectations.

Patients: Social media study subjects publicly provided insights and judgments about care and outcomes. Google data is aggregated and thus anonymous.

Main Outcome Measures: Researchers evaluated comparative qualities among patients' online comments. Secondly, research into use of Internet search engines further revealed expectations of care and outcomes.

Results: Multiple Vanguard studies reveal a generally high level of satisfaction with the quality of clinical care received, accompanied by significant dissatisfaction of non-clinical aspects. Examples of the latter include poor communications by staff and lack of clarity in clinical information.

Conclusions: Despite general satisfaction with clinical outcomes, patients are often gravely disappointed in experiences outside examination and operating rooms, starting with evaluating providers' skills online before the first appointment. Physicians and other providers might consider new roles to play as digital healthcare educators and in delivering not just quality of care but quality of service.

INSTITUTE

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