Universität Basel

Publication

Quantitative Ratings and Narrative Comments on Swiss Physician Rating Websites: Frequency Analysis

Background: Physician rating websites (PRWs) have been developed as part of a wider move toward transparency around health care quality, and these allow patients to anonymously rate, comment, and discuss physicians' quality on the Web. The first Swiss PRWs were established in 2008, at the same time as many international PRWs. However, there has been limited research conducted on PRWs in Switzerland to date. International research has indicated that a key shortcoming of PRWs is that they have an insufficient number of ratings.Objective: The aim of this study was to examine the frequency of quantitative ratings and narrative comments on the Swiss PRWs.Methods: In November 2017, a random stratified sample of 966 physicians was generated from the regions of Zürich and Geneva. Every selected physician was searched for on 4 rating websites (OkDoc, DocApp, Medicosearch, and Google) between November 2017 and July 2018. It was recorded whether the physician could be identified, what the physician's quantitative rating was, and whether the physician had received narrative comments. In addition, Alexa Internet was used to examine the number of visitors to the PRWs, compared with other websites.Results: Overall, the portion of physicians able to be identified on the PRWs ranged from 42.4% (410/966) on OkDoc to 87.3% (843/966) on DocApp. Of the identifiable physicians, only a few of the selected physicians had been rated quantitatively (4.5% [38/843] on DocApp to 49.8% [273/548] on Google) or received narrative comments (4.5% [38/843] on DocApp to 31.2% [171/548] on Google) at least once. Rated physicians also had, on average, a low number of quantitative ratings (1.47 ratings on OkDoc to 3.74 rating on Google) and narrative comments (1.23 comment on OkDoc to 3.03 comments on Google). All 3 websites allowing ratings used the same rating scale (1-5 stars) and had a very positive average rating: DocApp (4.71), Medicosearch (4.69), and Google (4.41). There were significant differences among the PRWs (with the majority of ratings being posted on Google in past 2 years) and regions (with physicians in Zurich more likely to have been rated and have more ratings on average). Only Google (position 1) and Medicosearch (position 8358) are placed among the top 10,000 visited websites in Switzerland.Conclusions: It appears that this is the first time Google has been included in a study examining physician ratings internationally and it is noticeable how Google has had substantially more ratings than the 3 dedicated PRWs in Switzerland over the past 2 and a half years. Overall, this study indicates that Swiss PRWs are not yet a reliable source of unbiased information regarding patient experiences and satisfaction with Swiss physicians; many selected physicians were unable to be identified, only a few physicians had been rated, and the ratings posted were overwhelmingly positive.

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