

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF INFORMATION QUALITY IN COMMERCIAL AND NON PROFIT BREAST CANCER WEBSITES

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ABSTRACT

Eighty five million Americans access the Internet for health information. But lacks of content regulation, free access, and increased marketing potential have meant that content providers increasingly heed to the call of their own agendas (monetary or non monetary) rather than audience's information needs. An examination of the relationship between the monetary agendas of organizations and the quality of health information on their websites is thus critical in aiding the decision-making skills of online health information seekers.

Considering that breast cancer is the leading cancer site among American women, we conducted a comparative analysis of online breast cancer information between commercial and nonprofit websites. Content in top 20 popular breast cancer websites (comprising a total of 627 web pages) was analyzed using the European Union's quality criterion for online health information. Nonprofit websites had a significantly higher overall score and stated sources with source credentials more frequently than commercial websites did. Commercial websites scored marginally higher in stating funding sources and offering 'current' information. Neither of the two groups made their website handicapped-accessible.

These results highlight the worryingly low quality levels of online breast cancer information, and make a call for increased scholarly and industry attention to this area. This study makes recommendations for future research with due consideration to the most recent explosion of health blogs, and Information Communication Technologies (ICT's) in developing countries in the context of online health information seeking behavior.