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Title

Outcomes of proxy online health information seeking: Findings from a mixed studies review and a mixed methods research study

Priority 1 (Research Category)

Healthcare informatics

Presenters

Reem El Sherif, PhD, MBChB, Roland Grad, MD, MSc, FCFP, Pierre Pluye, MD, PhD

Abstract

Context: Proxy online health information seekers informally seek online health information on behalf of or because of others without necessarily being asked to do so. Proxy information seekers in a person's social circle may help this person overcome information-seeking barriers (e.g., low level of e-health literacy) and illness challenges (e.g., when they are too physically weak to search themselves). However, little is known of the context, use, and reported outcomes of proxy online health information seeking.

Objective: To explore the outcomes of proxy online health information seeking behaviour.

Study Design: Mixed studies literature review with framework synthesis, then a convergent mixed methods study. Setting: In partnership with Naître et Grandir (an online parenting resource). Population: Members of the entourage of parents of 0- to 8-year-old children (grandparents, family members, friends, neighbours, or professionals working with children). Instrument: Validated 'Information Assessment Method' (IAM) questionnaire.

Results: An initial theoretical model was developed using findings from the mixed studies review. IAM questionnaire responses showed that entourage members who actively seek online information were more likely to report that the information can help them be less worried, handle a problem, and decide what to do with someone else. In the interviews, entourage members reported proxy-seeking for reassurance, out of personal curiosity, as part of their professional role, or following an explicit request from the parents. They used the information to provide informational support (either by sharing the webpage directly or discussing its content), or to provide material support for a child in their care (e.g., playing games with a child), or to provide emotional support. In some cases, they did not share the information to avoid tensions with the parents in question. Positive outcomes included improvement in the relationship with others, and negative outcomes included interpersonal tensions when information was unsolicited. The initial model was revised to incorporate findings from the mixed methods study.

Expected Outcomes: Findings from this study advance knowledge on proxy online health information seeking behaviour and outcomes. Health care practitioners can target patients' entourage with

information for dissemination and use. Patients can be encouraged to turn to their entourage for support using online health information.