



Appraisal

Media: Review – Healthtalk: an excellent website to help understand the experiences of patients

<http://www.healthtalk.org/>

Site background: Healthtalk.org is a freely available website that aims to provide reliable information about health issues by sharing people's real-life experiences. The website is managed by a charity called DIPEX and the research material that appears on the site is provided by The Health Experiences Research Group (HERG) at The University of Oxford's Nuffield Department of Primary Healthcare Sciences. The website is a not-for-profit venture and seeks to help and inform patients, carers, and healthcare professionals by sharing trustworthy healthcare information and personal health experiences.

Site aims: The site has three key aims. First, to support patients and their loved ones, who may feel alone or ill-prepared for challenges ahead. Second, to support healthcare professionals in providing patient-focused care. Third, to promote better communication between patients and health professionals. To fulfil these aims and provide content for the website, researchers from the HERG travel around the United Kingdom to interview people with a range of different health conditions, experiences, and backgrounds. These people are asked to tell their stories in their own words by focusing on what matters to them the most. The researchers then produce detailed summaries from the interviews, and video and audio clips are selected to illustrate the different experiences that are described. Well established qualitative research methods are used by the HERG research team who are supported by an advisory panel of people affected by the health issue, health professionals, and academics. This content is provided to help patients make more informed decisions about their treatment, make it easier to talk to friends and family, and find real-life advice on practical issues such as money and travel, emotional wellbeing, and the impact of their condition on work or education.

Site content: The website has a strong educational focus, with a mix of written and video content. Individual conditions are presented as a series of frequently asked questions and topic areas. Each section contains a written overview with one or more videos of people or health professionals providing further detail. For example, in the bone surgery section there is an explanation of how a knee replacement is actually performed, and this is supported by a video of a health professional describing the operation. Examples of rehabilitation exercises are provided later in the section, with an accompanying video of a patient describing personal experience of completing the exercises.

Healthtalk.org provides content across a range of health conditions and information is typically presented using patient-friendly language. There are numerous topics that are relevant to physiotherapists. Four main headings are used: People's Experiences, Young People's Experiences, Health Professionals, and Learning & Teaching. The People's Experiences section includes topics on bones/joints, cancer, disability/impairment, healthy living, intensive care,

later life, long-term health conditions, and women's health. Young People's Experiences include topics on arthritis, clinical trials, medical research, depression, long-term health conditions, and health and weight. The Health Professional and Learning & Teaching areas provide resources for professionals and services. These can be used for staff training or act as drivers for service improvement. Posters to advertise healthtalk.org in waiting rooms are downloadable. Video licensing options are also available for professional use of the content and a personalised video clip playlist can be created.

Ease of use: The website is very easy to use. The conditions are presented in an alphabetised list and grouped into sensible categories. Navigation between the areas devoted to people, young people, health professionals, and learning resources is very clear. The page for each condition can be easily navigated.

Quality: The developers of Healthtalk.org state that they are committed to provide high-quality, reliable, evidence-based information. The website has been certified by The Information Standard, NHS England's accreditation scheme for health and social care information, to help people decide which information is trustworthy. It is also accredited by the Royal College of General Practitioners and endorsed by the University of Oxford.

Strengths: One strength is the high quality of research presented on the website. Another is that it presents a mix of personal experiences of people experiencing healthcare as well as professional views. This mix of information makes the website engaging and accessible to people with health conditions, their families, and health professionals.

Limitations: The website does not currently provide experiences for all conditions that people and healthcare professionals deal with, although more conditions are regularly being added. Also, because the terminology used is very person-centred, which suits the intended patient audience, this can make it difficult for health professionals to locate information using clinical search terms.

Conclusion: Overall, healthtalk.org is an excellent website. With the increased drive for person-centred care, this website provides a depth of information that is useful for healthcare professionals to better understand patients' perspectives and experiences. It is a very useful resource to direct patients and families to, so they can better understand how conditions affect people on a day-to-day basis. The level of detail provided is greater than that typically possible from a practitioner in most clinical situations, and the stories are more personal. This website is a highly valuable resource for patients and professionals.

Provenance: Invited. Not peer reviewed.

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