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TOOLS FOR ADVANCING PHARMACY PRACTICE

Vaccination resources for health care providers

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To create a quick information evaluation tool (QIET) for judging the quality of online vaccination information sources.

Setting: This information is intended to be used in a retail or a community pharmacy setting where immunizations are provided.

Practice: The tool created can be used by immunization providers and patients to evaluate online sources of vaccination information.

Description: The tool is the result of a consensus from surveyed websites that provide ways to evaluate the reliability of online information. These websites were highlighted as reliable resources in the American Pharmacists Association's (APhA) Immunization Handbook.

Practice Innovation: Several websites provide ways to evaluate the reliability of online vaccine information; however, none were found that provided a consensus from several websites and examples of how to evaluate online information. This tool provides that consensus.

Interventions: This tool provides a way to judge the merits of online immunization information using a single set of useful criteria in place of various criteria listed in many different sources.

Evaluation: This tool will be successful if immunization providers and patients can use it to choose reliable sources of online vaccination information.

Results: Using the QIET, several non-APhA sources are evaluated.

Conclusion: The QIET is a potential resource that can be used by future studies to evaluate the reliability of online vaccine information.

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There are several websites that provide “reliable sources” of vaccination information. These lists of sources are compiled by health organizations and federal and state departments. Some examples include the Minnesota Department of Health,¹ the Immunization Action Coalition,² New York Department of Health,³ and the American Pharmacists Association's (APhA) Immunization Handbook.⁴

APhA's Immunization Handbook is a practical reference for pharmacy practitioners and pharmacy staff members who participate in immunization services. The author of APhA's Immunization Handbook, Lauren B. Angelo,⁵ recommends its use as a companion tool for schools of pharmacy that are providing training in the APhA Immunization Program for their students. The APhA Pharmacy-Based Immunization Delivery program is used nationwide. As a nationally recognized

program, it allows a pharmacist who has completed the program to immunize in every state (state licensure restrictions notwithstanding).⁶

APhA's Immunization Handbook stresses the importance of helping “patients evaluate and understand the evidence on which information is based, and guide them to credible scientific facts.”⁴ Although many websites provide lists of reliable information, few provide the criteria by which those sources are judged reliable. Although APhA's Immunization Handbook similarly does not provide criteria for evaluating online vaccine information, it does provide reliable web sources of vaccine safety information. Several of the web sources cited by APhA's Immunization Handbook provide comprehensive guides on evaluating the reliability of online content.

Objective

The objective of this paper is to provide a comprehensive, easy-to-use tool that condenses the recommendations for evaluating online vaccine information from several websites.

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Key Points**Background:**

- There are many websites that provide “reliable sources” of vaccination information.
- While there are several resources for the evaluation of online vaccine information using various criteria, inconsistencies between resources make those criteria difficult to apply.

Findings:

- This paper attempts to collect and codify reliability criteria from different sources in order to produce a useful evaluation tool.
- A provider or patient using the examples and tool as a guide can be confident that any website meeting all of the tool's criteria will provide reliable information.

Methods

Criteria for evaluating non-ApHA internet sources were included in the tool only if both of the following requirements were met:

1. The source website is included in APhA's Immunization Handbook's list of reliable immunization information or is accessible as a link from the website listed in the handbook.
2. The website explains its criteria for assessing the reliability of online information. Of the 25 total websites surveyed,^{7–31} only 7 met the criteria:
 - World Health Organization (WHO)⁷
 - American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)⁸
 - Immunizations for Public Health (I4PH),⁹ formally known as National Network for Immunization Information (NNii)
 - U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)¹⁰
 - Immunization Action Coalition (IAC)¹¹
 - University of California, San Francisco (UCSF)¹²
 - Canadian Pediatrics Society (CPS)¹³

Practice

This tool can be used by practitioners and patients for quick and effective evaluation of the quality of vaccine information provided by a web source that is *not* included in APhA's Immunization Handbook.

Setting

This information is targeted toward community pharmacies where immunizations are provided.

Of the 7 websites that met the inclusion criteria, a survey of the content of each website regarding the evaluation of reliable websites was undertaken. Every characteristic listed on the websites for the evaluation of reliable online information was included in the table. The following chart summarizes the survey taken from the websites that met the inclusion criteria. A tally with an X in the chart indicates that a website contains a certain characteristic specified in the table (Table 1). A tally was taken of every characteristic. If the tally total indicated that a majority of the websites (4 or more) contained the characteristic, it was accepted to be used in the quick information evaluation tool (QIET). The QIET can be used by

Table 1
Evaluation of characteristics of reliable online information^a

Characteristics	WHO	AAP	I4PH (NNii)	HHS	IAC	UCSF	CPS	Total
Disclosure of ownership, sponsorship, or source	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
Attribution of information, citations	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
Based on scientific research, published studies	X	X	X	X		X	X	6
Current information	X	X	X		X	X	X	6
Authenticity of sources and credentials	X		X	X		X	X	5
Stated mission or purpose	X		X	X	X			4
Contains contact information	X		X	X			X	4
Review process in place	X		X		X			3
Original or primary source cited			X		X	X		3
Nonmedical cures are not mentioned		X		X		X		3
Indicate if anecdote or opinion	X		X				X	3
Standards of writing and editing	X					X		2
No anonymous information		X				X		2
Conflicts of information listed	X					X		2
Information is not one sided or biased	X					X		2
Data protection, information safety and privacy	X							1
Responsible partnering	X							1
Accountability to users	X							1
Accessible by people with disabilities	X							1
Readily accessible in the public domain for various technologies and skill levels	X							1
Design is logical, consistent, and easily navigated	X							1
Does not suggest medical conspiracies				X				1
Weighs evidence and limitations				X				1

Abbreviations used: AAP, American Academy of Pediatrics; CPS, Canadian Pediatrics Society; HHS, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; I4PH, Immunizations for Public Health; IAC, Immunization Action Coalition; UCSF, University of California, San Francisco; WHO, World Health Organization.

^a An X indicates that the website has the characteristic indicated in the first column. Website contents may be subject to change. Information is valid as of February 25, 2016.

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