

## HEALTH ON THE NET: DO WEBSITE SEARCHES RETURN RELIABLE HEALTH INFORMATION ON PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS FOR HIV?

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**Objective:** To analyse the quality and readability of health information on the Internet regarding Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis [PrEP] for Human Immunodeficiency Virus [HIV] in an Australian context.

**Background:** For HIV-uninfected patients, PrEP has been demonstrated to prevent new infections among those at risk. In February 2018 the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee recommended the listing of PrEP on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme for HIV prevention. It is likely many consumers wishing to know more about PrEP will use the Internet to glean information.

**Methods:** Using the Google, Bing and Yahoo search engines, searches were performed using five pre-determined keywords related to PrEP in English. The first ten webpages for each search term were collected. Unique webpages were reviewed for: (1) Accreditation via the World-Health-Organisation-endorsed Health On the Net [HON] tool; (2) Quality of information using the Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine [ASHM] PrEP Fact Sheet as a gold-standard, with application of a binary point system to tabulate a cumulative score out of ten; and (3) Readability using Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Levels.

**Results:** Of 150 websites analysed, 67 were unique, 25.4% of which were HON-accredited and considered transparent in quality. All websites sponsored by commercial healthcare networks were HON-accredited, whereas neither hospitals nor medical societies were. On average, websites scored 4.63 out of 10 using the ASHM PrEP Fact Sheet as a gold standard. Readability measurements were at a level compatible with at least high school education.

**Conclusion:** Our study demonstrates that Google, Bing, and Yahoo identify a significant number of transparent websites that provide high-quality information pertaining to PrEP for consumers. However, the readability of many websites is at a level requiring high school education. Further studies are required to assess the availability of quality PrEP information available to consumers from non-English speaking backgrounds.

**Disclosure of Interests:** There are no sources of support for this paper. The authors report no disclaimers.