

Patient-Physician Communications about Prostate Cancer on YouTube

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Physicians play an important role as digital “first responders” to combat online misinformation and disseminate evidence-based information. Despite the growing participation of physicians in social networks, less is known about the prevalence and nature of patient-physician communications within social media platforms.

We examined the first 25 YouTube videos in a search for prostate cancer in English and Spanish. Videos were scored using the validated DISCERN criteria for the quality of consumer health information. In addition, comments underneath the videos were examined for the presence of requests for medical advice and patient-physician communications.

Overall, 16 (32%) of the first prostate cancer videos in English and Spanish were created by doctors. Videos from doctors and non-doctors both had median overall DISCERN scores of 3 out of 5 (moderate quality). In the comments section associated with 56% of videos, YouTube users requested medical advice, and some advice was given 32%. The comments section underneath 4 (8%) videos contained multiple patient-physician interactions, including the provision of medical advice about screening and treatment.

In summary, approximately 1/3 of the first YouTube videos about prostate cancer in English and Spanish were published by doctors. Videos from doctors were similar in quality to other videos. The YouTube comments section is used for provision of medical advice by physicians and lay users.