

Readability of Online Materials for Dupuytren's Contracture

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INTRODUCTION: Dupuytren's contracture is a common disorder involving fibrosis of the palmar fascia. Online content describing the disease and its treatment have not been well-characterized. As patients are predominantly using online materials to gather health care information, it is imperative to assess the readability and appropriateness of this content.^{1,2} The recommended grade level for educational materials is seventh to eighth grade according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH).³ It is also critical that online content address both surgical and nonsurgical treatment options for Dupuytren's contracture to ensure an adequate foundation for patient education. This study aims to assess the readability and content of online patient resources for Dupuytren's contracture.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: The largest public search engine, Google, was queried using the term "dupuytren's contracture surgery" on February 26, 2016. Location filters were disabled and sponsored results excluded to avoid any inadvertent search bias. The 10 most popular websites were identified and all relevant, patient-directed information within one click from the original site was downloaded and saved as plain text. Readability was analyzed using five established analyses (Readability-score.com, Added Bytes, Ltd., Sussex, UK).

RESULTS: Analysis of ten websites demonstrates an average grade level of at least 11th grade (Flesch-Kincaid, 10.2; Gunning-Fog, 13.1; Coleman-Liau, 14.4; SMOG 10.0; Automated Readability, 9.7; Average Grade Level, 11.5). Overall Flesch Reading Ease Index was 46.4, which is rated as "difficult." No single article was at the recommended reading level.

CONCLUSION: Online materials available for treatment of Dupuytren's contracture are above recommended reading levels and do not include a comprehensive explanation of treatment options, which may prevent appropriate decision-making in patients seeking treatment for this condition. Surgeons should be cognizant of available online patient materials and make efforts to develop and provide more appropriate materials.

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