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The Brazilian blog Ecce Medicus and the information on H1N1 flu vaccine for lay people: a case study in Health Communication

by Sibele Fausto on Wed, 11/30/2011 - 18:21

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Abstract:

Introduction

Health Sciences specialized libraries traditionally deal with several information sources for a group of specialists and experts. As the importance of information for the nonprofessional and lay people grows, blogs appear as an useful resource for health communication to the general public. This work aimed to analyze a serie of six posts from a Brazilian blog focused in health, called Ecce Medicus (http://scienceblogs.com.br/eccemedicus), enlightening on the A H1N1 Influenza Vaccine during the official national campaign in 2010, in order to verify the most frequent doubts from internet users on the vaccine, investigating their needs of health information.

Methods

The analysis was performed by a text mining in the comments into the Ecce Medicus' six posts on the A H1N1 Influenza Vaccine, quantifying the incidences of words indicative of doubt (1), which allowed the segmentation of the internet users' most frequent doubts in categories. The results were treated and the software NetDraw (2) was used for grouping the sample's categories.

Results

The six posts have got 486 comments in total. The blogger's responses to comments were excluded, resulting in a sample of 388 messages with 78 frequent relevant terms, which categorized by similarity resulted in 8 more evident categories: Vaccine and Alcohol; Vaccine and Components; Vaccine and Children; Vaccine and Dosing; Vaccine and Collateral Effects; Vaccine and Pregnancy; Vaccine and Quality; Vaccine and Fear. The analysis in the incidence of terms (total n=792) through networks of meanings allowed to visualize graphically the most relevant categories, indicating that Vaccine and Children (n=157), Vaccine and Alcohol (n=133) and Vaccine and Collateral Effects (n=131) have leaded the doubts about the A H1N1 Influenza Vaccine.

Discussion and Conclusion

These posts reached high flow in access and in number of comments, showing that the interactivity of the blog tools facilitate communication and encourages the lay public to manifest itself and interact. The analysis of comments showed many doubts about the vaccine, and the grouping of terms by relevance highlighted the categories which raised more questions, with Vaccine and Children, Vaccine and Alcohol and Vaccine and Collateral Effects leading in number of terms occurrences. This approach enlightens the internet blogs as useful tools for searching about health information by the lay public, indicating that the official health campaigns should reinforce their strategies to disseminate

health information in a simple and understandable way to the general public, in order to inform and influence individual and community decisions that improve health. Also, Health libraries should consider these new sources of information, expanding the options for the lay public.

Keywords:
Blogging, Health Communication, Health Literacy, Popular Works [Publication Type], Influenza Vaccines.

References:

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