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Background

- Parents use social media before and after medical diagnoses in order to connect with other parents with a similar experience.¹
- Authors argue that the sociology of networks is even more important than the content or validity of information presented.²
- Similarities in traits and values strengthen social networks and peer-to-peer influence, and allow rejection of expert opinions surrounding healthcare information and decisions.²
- "Digital pandemics" of misinformation spread even faster, when the power of these networks overcomes the validity of expert opinions.²

Purpose

- To assess parental engagement with online resources regarding their child's healthcare needs

Methods

- Anonymous, online survey via QR code on REDCap
- Random survey distribution
- 24 questions with either 1 answer choice or multiple answer choices
- Respondents are parents of pediatric dental patients at the University of Pennsylvania Pediatric Dentistry Clinic who are native English speakers
- Surveys must be 100% complete
- Descriptive statistics and frequencies performed to analyze collected data

Results

Demographics of respondents, followed by number of responses or percent of total responses:

- Gender:** women (85%), men (14%)
- Age:** <20 years (3), 20-25 years (4), 25-30 years (8), 30-35 years (22), 35-40 years (20), >40 years (17)
- Race:** Black or African American (54%), White (25%), Asian (8%), American Indian or Alaskan Native (1%), Other (10%)
- Child with diagnosed medical condition:** yes (36%), no (63%)

Results (cont.)

Demographics of respondents, followed by number of responses or percent of total responses:

- Education level:** less than high school (4%), high school or GED (33%), College (31%), Bachelor's degree (20%), Graduate degree (10%)
- Annual income:** <\$20k (11), \$20-50k (22), \$50-100k (26), \$100-150k (9), >\$150k (6)
- Marital status:** single (44), engaged (2), married (16), divorced (5), widowed (4), other (3)
- Number of children:** 1 (15), 2 (26), 3 (17), 4 or greater (12), other (4)
- What information have you inquired:** how often should my child see a dentist (47), how often should my child get a cleaning (35), how often should my child have x-rays (16), how often should my child receive fluoride (25), is fluoride safe (27), are routine x-rays safe (13), other (13)

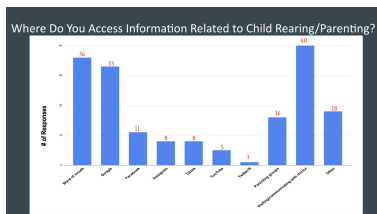


Figure 1. Number of responses and sources of information regarding child rearing and parenting. Respondents could select multiple answers.

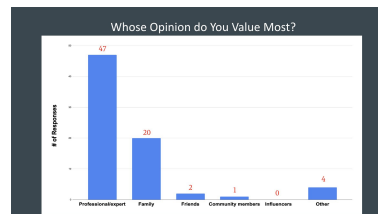


Figure 2. Number of responses and selections of valued opinions. Respondents could select multiple answers.

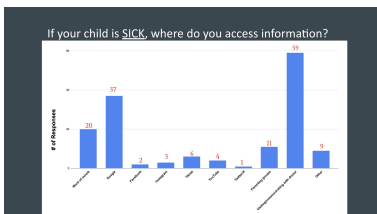


Figure 3. Number of responses and sources of information regarding information when a child is sick. Respondents could select multiple answers.

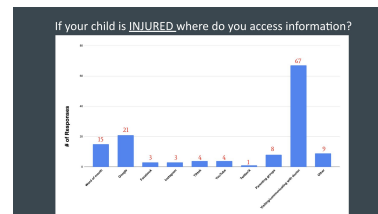


Figure 4. Number of responses and sources of information regarding information when a child is injured. Respondents could select multiple answers.

Results (cont.)

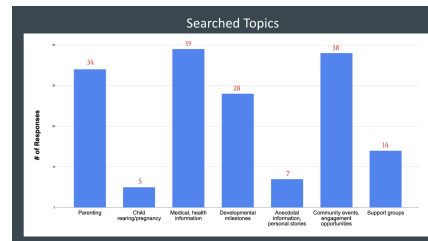


Figure 5. Number of responses to most frequently searched topics. Respondents could select multiple answers.

Conclusions

- Information is mainly accessed through word of mouth, Google and visiting a doctor/professional.
- When a child is sick or injured, parents mainly turn to Google and communicating with a doctor.
- However, despite the minority of responses, parents do still turn to social media to seek healthcare information.
- Previous research found that trust in health professionals prevailed over trust in online resources,³ which is consistent with the results of this study.³
- Trust within a patient-provider relationship and network is essential to understand and communicate with patients and families.
- It is unclear when parents turn to social media for answers. Previous studies have found that parents tend to use social media "after healthcare has been sought rather than when trying to determine if healthcare is required."¹

Future Directions

- The timing of *when* health information is sought can be analyzed in future studies, in addition to focusing specifically on dental topics that parents seek.
- Eventually, piloting an online pediatric dental database could provide more universal access to parents for information regarding their child's oral health.

References

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