



A qualitative analysis of pediatric aerodigestive program websites

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The majority of pediatric aerodigestive program websites reported minimal information for prospective families seeking care.

Background

- Aerodigestive programs provide multidisciplinary care for children with complex airway, pulmonary, gastrointestinal, and feeding/swallowing disorders [1].
- Families of children with these conditions often rely on hospital websites and online resources when deciding where to seek care [2].
- Access to clear, detailed, and family-centered information helps caregivers understand available services, referral processes, and care pathways [3].
- Prior studies in other specialties show significant variation in the quality and completeness of online hospital information [4].
- Lack of robust information may lead to delayed referrals, increased caregiver stress, and inequities in access to specialized care [5].
- Evaluating the availability of aerodigestive program information across hospitals highlights opportunities to standardize communication and better support families.

Figure 1: Sample aerodigestive program website

Methods

- Eighty-five pediatric hospitals were identified through the U.S. News & World Report (USNWR).
- Programs were assessed for the presence of an aerodigestive-specific webpage, evaluated against 10 criteria, and linked with their associated USNWR ranking. The 10 criteria included are represented in Figure 2.

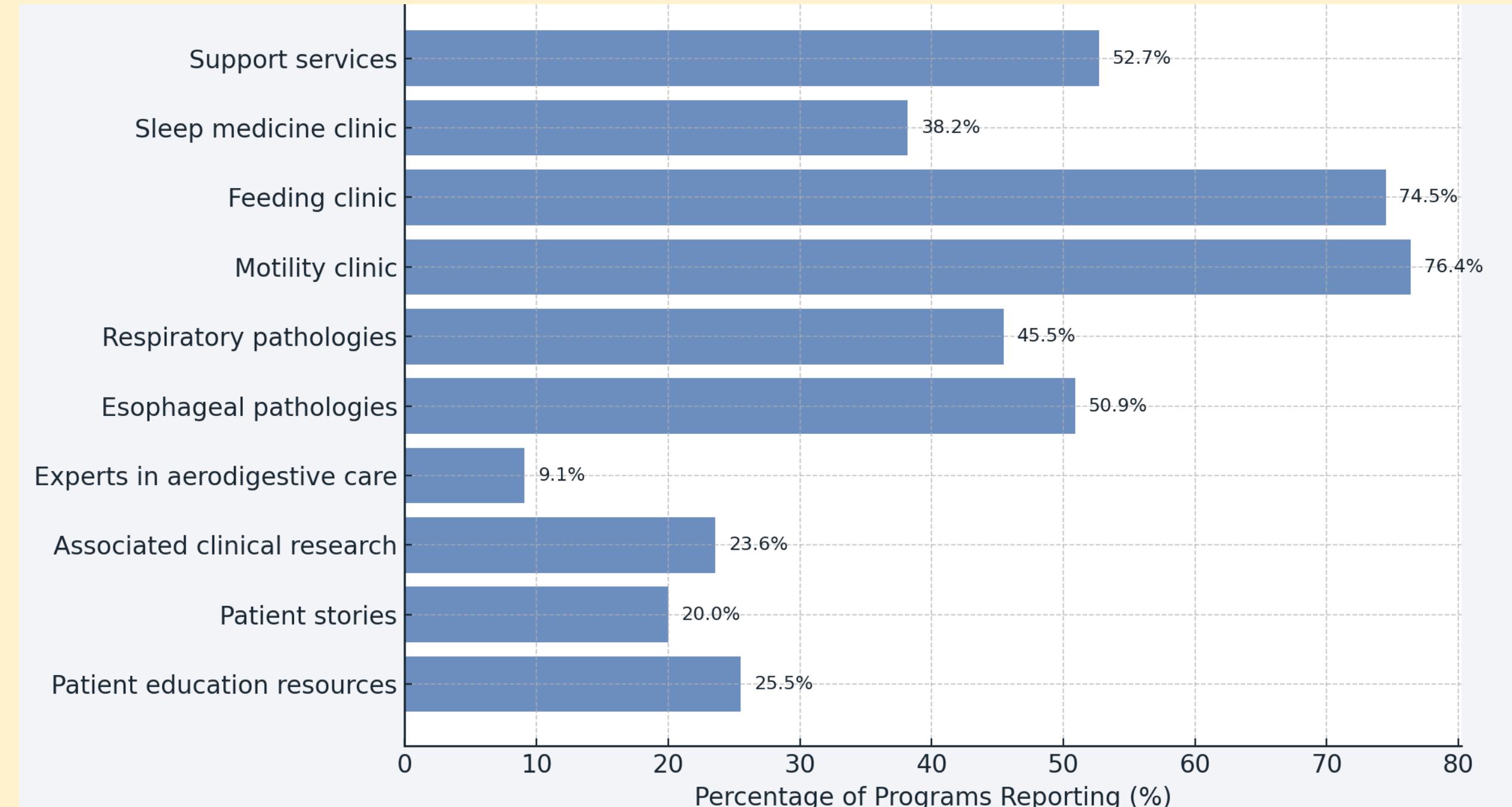
Figure 2: Aerodigestive program website evaluation criteria



Results

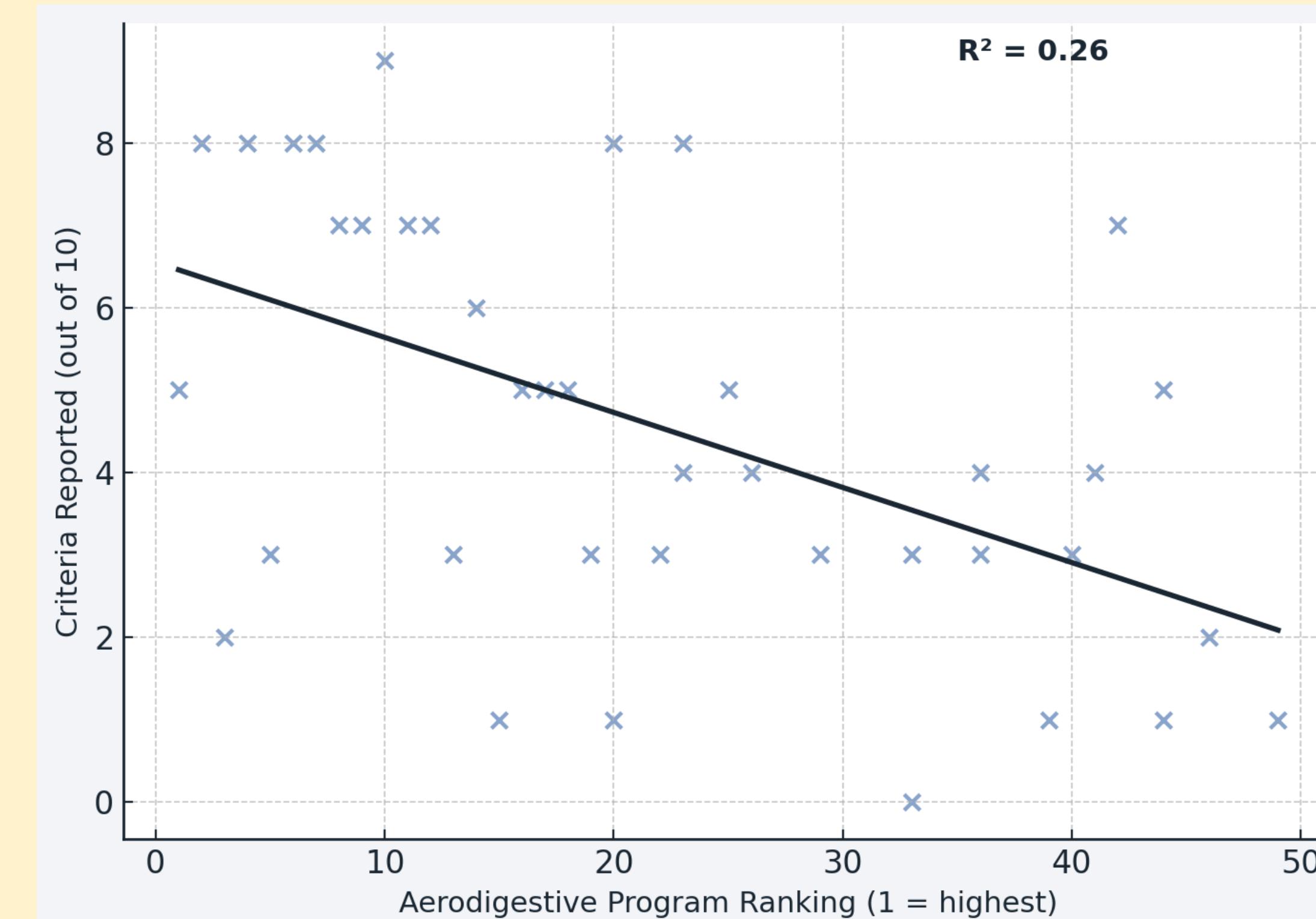
- Of 85 pediatric hospital programs, 56 (65.9%) had an aerodigestive-specific webpage.
- There was substantial variability in the reporting of criteria across aerodigestive program websites (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Information reported on aerodigestive program websites (n=56)



- A negative correlation was found between pediatric hospital ranking and percentage of evaluation criteria reported by each aerodigestive program website ($R^2=0.26$, $p<0.05$) (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Correlation between USNWR ranking and criteria reporting for aerodigestive websites



Discussion

- There is wide variability in the information reported on aerodigestive program websites.
- Feeding (74.5%) and motility clinics (76.4%) were the most frequently described, while experts in the field (9.1%) and clinical research (23.6%) were least frequently reported.
- Higher-ranked programs (closer to rank 1) reported more criteria overall, suggesting that more prestigious centers are also more transparent online.
- Robust website content may enhance family trust, support referral pathways, and reduce barriers to accessing care [6].
- Programs with limited online information risk contributing to delayed referrals, caregiver stress, and inequities in access [2][5].
- Establishing minimum standards for website content could help ensure that all families, regardless of where they seek care, have access to consistent and reliable program information [7].
- Future work should assess whether website comprehensiveness influences family decision-making and care utilization [8].

Conclusion

- Less than two-thirds of 85 pediatric aerodigestive programs had webpages dedicated to complex airway care. Moreover, webpages often lacked key information useful to families in making informed decisions.
- Next steps will include surveying families regarding what criteria is important to them and re-assessing websites for the presence of these characteristics.

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