How do clinicians consume online medical reference information?

Learnings from Elsevier’s Use Case Research
At Elsevier, we have a rich history in collecting and disseminating evidence-based information. As a leader in the field, combining content with technology to turn information into actionable knowledge, we regularly conduct market research to understand how clinicians use online medical reference information, which helps guide our product development. We are also keen to share and explore our findings with key customers and thought partners.

With this in mind, we embarked on a global study, surveying 507 specialist clinicians and residents based on six use cases that we previously identified and validated through qualitative interviews to understand how clinicians use such information.

Executive Summary

- The way that clinicians use information is complex and the information they need is varied but there are identifiable commonalities, globally
- We identified six use cases that can be divided into patient-facing and non-patient-facing segments, both which are roughly equal in importance to clinicians across teaching and non-teaching hospitals
- Many clinicians start their search journey across the use cases by looking for answers on PubMed and Google while some revert to sources such as Wikipedia which are not evidence-based
- Value relative to usage is higher for more in-depth non-patient-facing activities, however frequency of usage is highest for patient-facing use cases such as finding quick answers
- Overall, clinicians value patient-facing and non-patient-facing activities equally and require a wide breadth and depth of information to support their day-to-day work
Methodology & Sample

A quantitative survey was completed by 507 international specialist clinicians and residents

Here’s what we discovered.

Clinicians use online medical reference information in different ways:

- To find a **quick answer** in between or during patient consultations (drug dosing, comorbidities...)
- To develop or confirm assessment and treatment plan for a patient (guidelines, trial findings, images...)
- To keep abreast of the latest thinking in a field of specialty (latest trial findings, launches, key opinion leader views...)
- For **learning** purposes (my own learning...)
- For **teaching** purposes (teaching others, preparing lectures, preparing/reviewing exams, presenting to colleagues...)
- For **clinical research** (writing articles, developing protocols, for clinical trials...)
Where do clinicians start searches for online medical information?

When clinicians look for online medical information across the different use cases, many start their search with free resources such as PubMed and Google. While a wide range of sources are used, some, like Wikipedia are not evidence-based.

What is the value of each use case around the world?

Overall, clinicians attribute equal value to patient-facing and non-patient-facing use cases in the context of their day-to-day work. Clinicians practicing in the US and other developed countries rate the use cases very consistently, whereas those in developing countries put higher overall emphasis on the non-patient-facing use cases. This may be reflective of the higher relative focus on growing clinician numbers, capacity and skills, alongside treating patients.
How often is online medical information used per use case and what is the value per session?

Clinicians use online information resources/apps for both patient-facing and non-patient-facing activities. However, the frequency of use for such activities, the value clinicians ascribe to them and the depth of information they require varies significantly between use cases. In particular, the patient-facing use case of finding quick answers requires more synoptic information and has the highest level of use at on average almost 5 times a week. In contrast, non-patient-facing use cases requiring more in-depth information are used less frequently, however clinicians indicate finding more value for each usage session.

Within each use case, what are clinicians asking for?

Based on the findings highlighted in this study, it is clear that online medical information resources are needed to support clinicians across both their patient-facing and non-patient-facing activities, which they tend to value equally. To get a better view of their search behaviour, we dug deeper to discover the types of information that clinicians look for during these activities. The key takeaways here are the wide breadth and depth of information they require for their day-to-day work and the necessity of online resources that can fulfill these needs.
In our endeavour to partner with our customers to deliver high quality patient care, we continue to run research studies like this one on a yearly basis to provide insights into the complex and changing ways that clinicians are consuming medical information. We are also continuously looking at ways to address these use cases to better support clinicians with ClinicalKey.

If you would like to learn more about this research, please contact your local Elsevier account manager.

For more information on ClinicalKey please visit elsevier.com/solutions/clinicalkey