Internet Use Among Parents of Children Undergoing Elective Surgery

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### Background

Parents and children alike are often anxious about what will occur in the operating suite. Parents of children undergoing surgery are typically anxious to find information about the surgery and anesthesia, potential risks, and recovery information.\(^1\) Web-based sources are increasingly used as a source of information for everything, including healthcare. A variety of information of varying quality exists on the internet, from information provided by the National Institutes of Health and disease-specific websites to personal blogs posted by family members.\(^3\) Many institutions across the country, in an effort to be more patient centered, have developed materials to provide patients and families with information about their planned surgical procedures and anesthesia care. Some institutions are adopting a knowledge management system known as a Wiki. This system enables patients to access information compiled by a number of different providers via the internet. This type of system allows providers to continually update information and provide the patient with the most up-to-date and accurate resources. The purpose of our study was to assess parental access to, and utilization of, internet resources about anesthesia and surgical procedures before pediatric outpatient surgeries.

### Methodology

After IRB exemption of the study, and development of the survey tool, the investigators invited parents of children ≤ 11 years old who were scheduled for outpatient surgery at the University of Kentucky to participate in a 19 question anonymous survey on website use. Ninety five parents participated in the survey during the pre-operative period. The survey collected demographics and information pertaining to use of internet websites in obtaining information on the child’s planned surgery.

### Results

The vast majority of respondents (> 88%) reported internet access at home, with nearly 50% using the internet for information related to the child’s planned procedures. Many caregivers (43.6%) reported use of the internet as their primary source for obtaining information about anesthesia and operative procedures. Of the 50% of respondents who used the internet, over 75% visited medically relevant sites such as NIH and WebMD. However, more than half of respondents (52.6%) used forums, blogs, or Wikipedia as their primary source. Many of these resources may be biased, are not peer reviewed and are representative of the opinions of individuals.

### Conclusions

The more we know about the types and quality of information parents are accessing, the better we will be able to support them in our patient and family education efforts. It is important that we acknowledge parents’ search for knowledge, as well as discuss the information found and assist parents in accessing reliable and accurate information. Kentucky is a rural state with areas where internet access is limited to dialup services. The data regarding use of internet resources by parents in Kentucky to access resources relevant to their child’s surgery probably dramatically underestimates usage in other areas of the country. Data suggest that most patients and families would benefit from an easily accessible internet resource constructed and managed by their healthcare team with accurate information regarding planned anesthesia and surgical procedures. Providing this resource early would help to alleviate caregiver fears and abrogate the need to seek information from resources of potentially dubious origin.

### References