Understanding the unmet need in patient-centric medical information in China: A survey on preference and information-seeking behaviors

Lawrence Law,[1] Yi-ou Wang,[2] Charli Dowsett,[1] David Wang,[1] Melanie Smith,[1] David Sheppard[1]

[1]Parexel International (MA) Corporation;
[2]The Illness Challenge Foundation, China

KEY FINDINGS

- **95%** of patients seek patient-centric medical information
- **30%** seek information daily or weekly
- While social media channels are favored, **44%** of patients still prefer medical publication platforms
- Patients are most interested in treatment effectiveness **(48%)** and latest clinical research **(27%)**

WHY DOES THIS RESEARCH MATTER?

Yi-ou Wang, patient advocate and Secretary General of The Illness Challenge Foundation, explains why the results from Parexel's survey are important for the patient community in China.

Scan the QR code below to listen to her perspectives and view additional information:



Yi-ou Wang
Patient Representative
The Illness Challenge Foundation, Shanghai, China

INTRODUCTION

The unmet need

- Little is known about the patient-centric medical information-seeking behaviors of patients in China.
  - In a cross-sectional study in Zhejiang Province, 78% of urban adult patients sought "medical information" online.[1]
- However, patients and their caregivers may find such patient-centric medical information to be technical and challenging.
- Geographic disparities in health literacy among patients is well documented in China, and often leads to worse health outcomes and increased expenditure.[2]
- Knowing how patients seek patient-centric medical information can deepen our understanding of their needs.

METHODS

Study design and respondents

- This was a cross-sectional, internet-based survey of Chinese patients with various medical conditions across different city tiers.*
- The questionnaire consisted of 14 questions, and included multiple-choice, Likert scale, and open-ended responses.
- No ethical approval was required as no identifiable personal information was collected.

Survey development and rollout

- The survey questions were developed by the authors based on their experience as medical communication/publication professionals.
- The survey was hosted on the Gooddr (https://www.gooddr.com/) platform, which is a medical data-marketing service provider.
- Responses were collected between February 2, 2024, and March 7, 2024.

Statistical analysis

- Completed surveys were included in the data analysis.
- The study findings were summarized descriptively as percentages (n/N), and rounded to whole numbers.

**Tier systems are widely used to classify Chinese cities. The tiers are used by analysts to study consumer behavior, income level, politics, and local trends to help tune strategies to local conditions (https://multimedia.scmp.com/2016/cities/).*

RESULTS

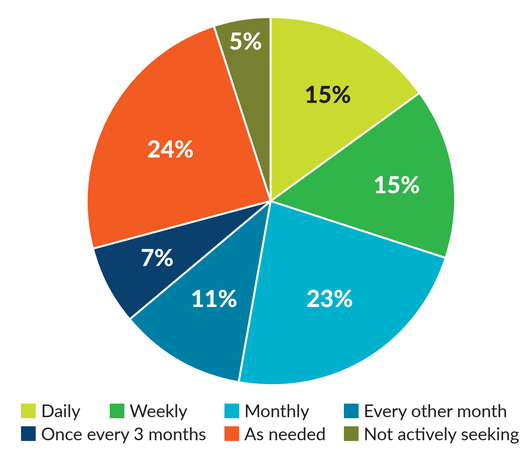
Respondent characteristics

- A total of 300 responses were received, all of which were included in the analysis.
- There were equal number of respondents from all 3 city tiers (n=100; each tier); 164 were female (55%; n=164); and the majority were aged 25–44 years (63%; n=188).
- The listed medical conditions were in the following therapy areas: oncology, hematology, gynecology, bone health, hepatology, respiratory, urology, cardiology, neurology, immunology, endocrinology, gastroenterology, dermatology, mental health, and infectious disease.

How often are patients seeking patient-centric medical information?

- 22% (n=67) of the respondents had "sufficient knowledge," while 10% (n=29) had "no knowledge" about their condition before they were diagnosed.
- The majority (63%; n=189) of respondents perceived access to patient-centric medical information about their condition as "very important".
- Almost all (95%; n=285) currently seek patient-centric medical information actively.
  - 30% (n=89) of respondents do so multiple times in a month ("daily" and "weekly") (**Figure 1**).
  - The main reasons among those who did not feel the need to seek information actively (n=15) include "already receiving information from doctors/nurses" (60%; n=9), "not knowing what to look for" (53%; n=8), and "information being too difficult to understand" (33%; n=5).

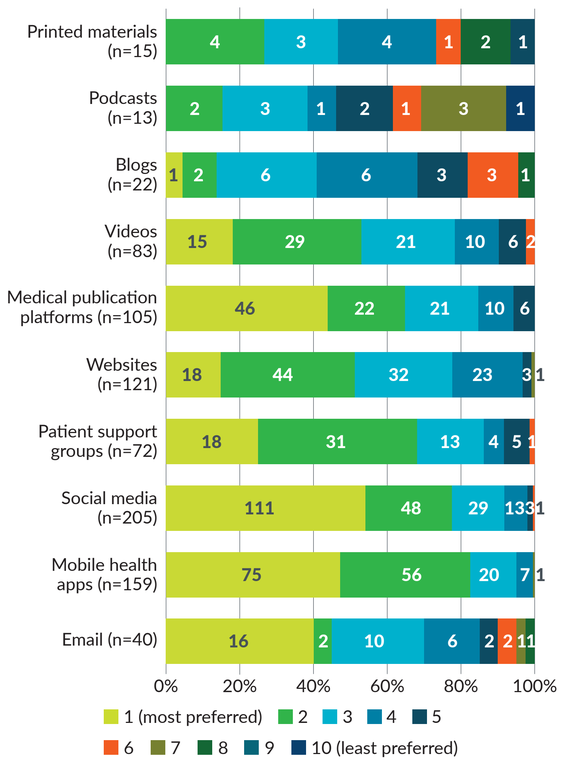
Figure 1. Frequency of access to patient-centric medical information (N=300)



Where do patients prefer to receive information?

- Social media (54%; n=111) and mobile health apps (47%; n=75) (**Figure 2**) were most preferred for receiving updated medical content.
- Patients ranked medical publication platforms (44%; n=46) (**Figure 2**) as the third most preferred method for receiving updated medical content.
- On the contrary, "printed materials" and "podcasts" were least preferred (**Figure 2**).

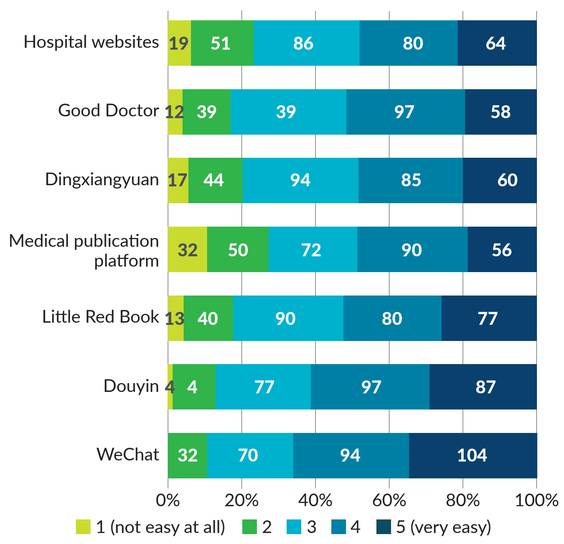
Figure 2. Patient-preferred method of accessing patient-centric medical information



How easy is it for patients to understand information?

- "WeChat" (52%; n=156) was the most common social media source of medical information for patients, and 66% (n=198) (**Figure 3**) rated the content as "easy" or "very easy" to understand.
- Other commonly used social media platforms included "Little Red Book" (30%; n=90) and "Douyin" (38%; n=114); of which a considerable proportion found their content "easy" or "very easy" to understand (Little Red Book: 52%, n=157; Douyin: 61%, n=184) (**Figure 3**).
- Although "medical publication platforms", was rated the most difficult to understand, with 27% ranking "not easy" or "not easy at all" (n=82) (**Figure 3**); 48.7% (n=146) (**Figure 3**) of patients still considered content found via this method as "easy" or "very easy" to understand, showing mixed results.

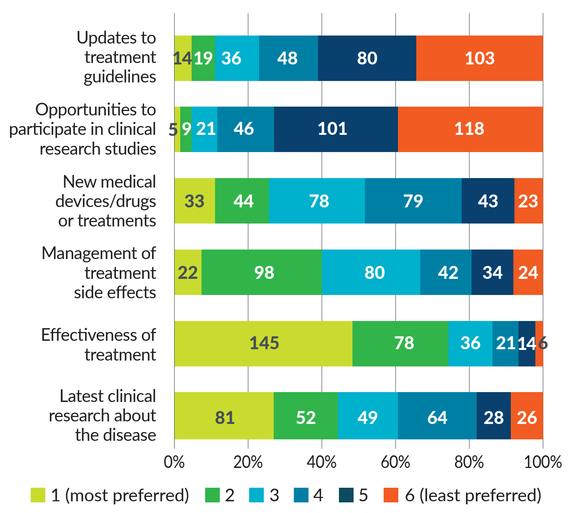
Figure 3. Level of understanding of information that patients encounter from online platforms (N=300)



What information are patients seeking?

- Patients would most prefer to receive information on the **"effectiveness of treatment"** (48%; n=145) **(Figure 4)**, followed by **"latest clinical research about the disease"** (27%; n=81) **(Figure 4)**.
- Only 5% (n=14) considered "updates to treatment guidelines" as most important.

Figure 4. Information that patients would like to receive about their condition (N=300)



Limitations

- This survey was conducted in China; therefore, the results may not be generalizable to other populations.
- Subgroup analyses were not reported because of the small sample size.

CONCLUSIONS

- Chinese patients strongly prefer digital channels. This highlights the importance of leveraging these approaches for patient education and engagement.
- While social media channels are perceived as providing easily understandable content, there is a notable interest in medical publication platforms, despite their perceived complexity.
- Patients prioritize information on treatment effectiveness and latest clinical research, indicating a desire for up-to-date, outcome-focused medical knowledge.
- In addition to content complexity, patients may be deterred from seeking patient-centric medical information due to not knowing what to look for.
- This indicates there is a clear unmet need in tailoring communication materials to the platforms, topics, and formats in which patients prefer to receive patient-centric medical information.

DISCLOSURES

Lawrence Law, Charli Dowsett, David Wang, Melanie Smith, and David Sheppard are employees of Parexel International (MA) Corporation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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