

Lifewire: Study - patients need more prescription drug information

by Ven Griva

Recently, an extensive scientific review has found that patients who have been prescribed a drug treatment are dissatisfied with the informational leaflets that come with their medicines.

By reviewing more than 70 studies from the United Kingdom, Europe, Australia and the U.S., researchers found that patients believe the informational leaflets that come with their prescription medicines are confusing and of little help. Instead, poor layout and complex language often hinder communication.

Many patients would like information that better tells them how the drug treatment helps them, researchers found.

The review was published March 27 in *Health Technology Assessment*, the international journal of the Health Technology Assessment program, part of the National Institute for Health Research in the United Kingdom.

"If you're going to have safe and effective medicines use, then we need to give patients the tools to do that job," said lead author D.K. Raynor of the University of Leeds in England.

According to the Partnership for Clear Health Communication, nearly 50 percent of all U.S. adults have difficulty understanding and using health information. In fact, the organization says, literacy skills are a stronger predictor of an individual's health status than age, income, employment status, education level or ethnicity.

To help drug companies produce more user-friendly consumer information, the authors offered the following recommendations:

- Use short, familiar words and short sentences.
- Use short headings that stand out.
- Use the largest possible type size.

- Leave plenty of white space.

- Use bullet points to organize lists.

PERCEPTION PROBLEM

Attractive, slender women on magazine covers make all women feel badly about their own appearance, regardless of the shape they are in, say researchers at the University of Missouri.

Scientists at the Columbia, Mo., school report that it takes just three minutes of viewing for women to be equally and negatively affected after being shown pictures of models in magazine ads, regardless of their height or weight.

The study, "Predictors of Media Effects on Body Dissatisfaction in European-American Women," was published in the March issue of *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*.

"Surprisingly, we found that weight was not a factor. Viewing these pictures was just bad for everyone," said Laurie Mintz, associate professor of education, school and counseling psychology in the University of Missouri College of Education. "It had been thought that women who are heavier feel worse than a thinner woman after viewing pictures of the thin ideal in the mass media."

The study first measured how 81 women felt about themselves, from their body weight to their hair. Some of the women were then shown neutral images of women, while the others were shown models in magazine ads for one to three minutes.

Afterward, the women who viewed the models reported a drop in their level of satisfaction with their own appearances.

"Most women do not go to a counselor for advice; they look to *Seventeen* or *Glamour* magazine instead," Mintz said. "These unrealistic images of women, who are often airbrushed or partially computer generated, have a detrimental impact on women and how they feel about themselves."

CIRCUMCISION RECOMMENDATION

United Nations health agencies recommended March 27 that heterosexual men undergo circumcision because of "compelling" evidence that it can reduce their chances by up to 60 percent of contracting HIV, the virus that leads to AIDS.

But World Health Organization and U.N. AIDS experts said men need to understand that circumcision offers only partial protection against the deadly virus.

"We must be clear," said Catherine Hankins of UNAIDS. "Male circumcision does not provide complete protection against HIV."

Still, men and women who consider male circumcision as an HIV preventive measure need to continue using other forms of protection such as male and female condoms, abstinence, delaying the start of sexual activity and monogamy, she said.

Otherwise, they could develop a false sense of security and engage in high-risk behaviors that could undermine the partial protection provided by male circumcision, the agencies said.

Men also should be warned that they are at a higher risk of being infected with HIV or passing on the virus if they resume sex before their wound from the procedure has healed.

The recommendations were based on a March meeting in Montreux, Switzerland, where experts discussed three trials - in Kenya, Uganda and South Africa - that produced "strong evidence" of the risk reduction resulting from heterosexual male circumcision.

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