

Correspondence

Social media use among patients with allergic contact dermatitis: an internet-based survey

Dear Editor,

Diagnosing allergic contact dermatitis (ACD) is challenging for patients and clinicians,¹ and patients often seek resources on the internet. Here, we present an internet-based survey investigating preferred online resources and social media use among ACD patients.

The Institutional Review Board of the University of Minnesota reviewed this study and considered it exempt. Using Qualtrics, a survey was designed and administered to several Facebook groups (Eczema, Contact Dermatitis, and Patch Test Alliance; Methylisothiazolinone Victims) and Reddit communities focused on contact dermatitis or eczema (r/eczema) from February to April 2021. Participants were required to report a diagnosis of ACD from a provider to complete the survey.

Two hundred and thirty-five individuals started the survey, while 214 completed it (91.0%). Most respondents were female (93.5%, 200/214), >40 years old (62.2%, 134/214), and from the United States (79.4%, 170/214) (Table 1). Other represented regions included Europe (10.3%, 22/214), Canada (3.7%, 8/214), Australia (0.9%, 2/214), and South America (0.5%, 1/214). Of the 170 US respondents, 38 of the 50 states were represented, with most participants from New York (8.2%, 14/170) and Florida (7.1%, 12/170).

The most common age range of first ACD symptoms were ages 20–39 (41.0%, 89/217). A quarter of respondents (25.7%, 55/214) reported seeing five or more physicians before receiving a diagnosis of ACD, with many participants (39.6%, 86/217) receiving their final diagnosis after >2 years of experiencing symptoms. Before receiving a diagnosis of ACD, participants reported utilizing the following resources to learn about their symptoms/diagnosis (could select more than one): a search engine (e.g., Google) (25.6%, 161/628), another doctor or healthcare provider (19.0%, 119/628), or professional website (e.g., ACDS) (16.4%, 103/628). Only 9.8% of participants utilized social media before their diagnosis to research their symptoms/disease. Twenty-five percent of participants found that information online encouraged them to see a dermatologist sooner, whereas 63% felt that it did not influence their decision to see dermatology.

After diagnosis, 92% (197/214) used social media to learn/discuss ACD. Facebook was the most utilized social media source (60.4%, 191/316) followed by Instagram (7.9%, 25/316), Reddit (7.6%, 24/316), and YouTube (7.6%, 24/316). A total of 84.6% (181/214) discovered their most useful online resource “themselves,” whereas 10.8% (23/214) reported that it was a

recommendation by their provider. About 65.9% (141/214) of respondents tried ACD treatments recommended by an online source. Regarding ACD, 66.8% (143/214) advised to others online, most commonly regarding lifestyle changes (28.2%, 109/386), finding a doctor (18.9% 73/386), and diagnoses (12.4%, 48/386) (Table 2).

Patient education after diagnosing ACD is crucial to successfully managing the disease.² Herein, we found almost all patients turned to social media after receiving their diagnosis despite social media not being a common resource prior to diagnosis (9.8%). This data implies that existing physician recommended resources may be lacking and that patients with an established ACD diagnosis seek community support. Due to established issues with misinformation on social media, continuing to increase physician-recommended resources and information is important.^{3,4} The American Contact Dermatitis Society (ACDS) provides a Facebook/Twitter page that patients can join to view reputable information regarding contact dermatitis. This resource, however, is mostly geared toward providers and not patients. To our knowledge, there are no peer-reviewed social media-related resources available to patients regarding contact dermatitis. We suggest that existing providers on social media incorporate more information regarding ACD and product alternatives onto their pages as well as new providers enter the field. Preliminary studies have suggested that provider-guided

Table 1 Demographics of surveyed participants

	N = 214 (%)
Male	13 (6.1)
Female	200 (93.5)
Other	1 (0.5)
White	200 (93.5)
Hispanic or Latino	6 (2.8)
Asian	6 (2.8)
Black or African American	4 (1.9)
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1 (0.5)
USA	170 (79.4)
UK	15 (7.0)
Canada	8 (3.7)
Australia	2 (0.9)
Spain	2 (0.9)
Denmark	1 (0.5)
Guatemala	1 (0.5)
Finland	1 (0.5)
Germany	1 (0.5)
Netherlands	1 (0.5)
Italy	1 (0.5)
Age >40	135 (63.1)

Table 2 Preferred social media websites of surveyed participants

	N = 316 (%)
Facebook	191 (60.4)
Instagram	25 (7.9)
Reddit	24 (7.6)
YouTube	24 (7.6)
Pinterest	11 (3.5)
Twitter	10 (3.2)
Other	6 (1.9)
TikTok	3 (0.9)
LinkedIn	3 (0.9)
Snapchat	3 (0.9)
Tumblr	1 (0.3)
"I did not use social media to learn about my disease"	15 (4.7)

support groups may also prove effective for patients coping with the challenges of this condition.⁵ Limitations to this study include its internet-based population.

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