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The diabetic, his feet and the Internet.

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The Internet is a growing source of easy available medical information but patients get often confused to locate accurate and relevant websites.

The present study aims to assess the quality of Internet data related to patients education about their feet. Websites were selected by introducing key words as given by a poll among diabetic patients in the most popular French search engines. The top 20 ranked websites by each search engine were kept for analysis. A grid was specially developed to assess quality of data, including general criteria issued from the relevant literature and specific items on diabetic foot derived from consensus conferences. Each quality form was filled out by two independent diabetologists and scores for quality of the site (maximum: 14 pts) and quality of data (max: 38 pts) were calculated (total maximum score: 52 pts).

Using three search engines (Google, Yahoo and Voilà) and combining the key words "foot+diabetes" ("pied+diabète") and "foot+diabetic" ("pied+diabétique"), only twenty seven websites among 120 (3x2x20) were identified as relevant. Using the quality grid, the websites were classified as highly recommended (total score ≥ 39), recommended with reservation ($39 >$ total score ≥ 26), not really recommended ($26 >$ total score ≥ 13) and not recommended at all (total score < 13). Inter-rater agreement was rather fair as assessed by kappa coefficients and regression line ($r = 0.97$) between scores. Only 5 sites (18.5%) were judged as highly recommended whereas 18 (66.7%) as not recommended. The best total score (= 44) was for a professional Belgian website and for the official website of the French Association for the Study of Diabetes (ALFEDIAM).

So, this study shows the poor quality of information on the diabetic foot given by French-speaking websites: our results agree with similar studies carried out in other chronic diseases. Measures are urgently needed to guide patients on adequate websites providing sound and reliable medical information and expertise: in this context, scientific societies have to play a major role in accrediting websites devoted to patients as done by the Health On the Net (HON) Foundation for medical information.