



Popular Web-Based Health and Medicine Resources Lack Consistent Information Regarding Breast Implant Illness

Nikita R, Ioschpe ADV*, Oleru OO, Seyidova N and Henderson PW

Department of Surgery, Division of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, USA

Abstract

Breast Implant Illness (BII) is a collection of systemic symptoms, including fatigue, joint pain, and cognitive problems that some women identify as a result of their breast implants. Although the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has acknowledged the correlation between breast implants and systemic symptoms, BII does not have an official ICD-10 diagnosis. This investigation assesses the dependability and accessibility of BII information on prominent health-related websites. The top 50 most popular medicine and health websites were identified using SimilarWeb, resulting in 251 BII-related articles across 49 websites. Only 17 (41%) websites provided a clear definition of BII, with symptoms ranging from 3 to 45 (mean: 3.6 ± 7.6). Twelve of these websites (70%) referenced evidence-based literature, while fourteen (80%) addressed Breast Implant-Associated Anaplastic Large Cell Lymphoma (BIA-ALCL). Only 18 articles (7%) addressed treatment options, with 16 (6%) referring to surgical removal. The study emphasizes the potential unreliability and significant inconsistencies in information regarding BII found online. This inconsistency has the potential to cause confusion and anxiety in patients. The results underscore the importance of healthcare providers providing patients with precise, evidence-based information and promoting the use of reputable sources. More research and online resources should be dedicated to understanding BII to guide patient management effectively.

Keywords: Breast implant illness; Digital education; Information reliability; Heal-related websites

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*Correspondence:

Anaïs Di Via Ioschpe, Department of Surgery, Division of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, 10 Union Square East, New York 10003, USA,

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Introduction

Breast Implant Illness (BII) is a phrase commonly used in both popular and scientific literature to refer to a constellation of multi-systemic symptoms that some women attribute to their prosthetic breast implants. These symptoms include fatigue, joint pain, and “brain fog,” among others (Figure 1) [1-3]. Although the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has acknowledged an association between breast implants and systemic symptoms, BII has yet to be assigned an official ICD-10 diagnosis [1]. As patients often rely on internet resources to gather health information about all medical topics, including BII, it is strongly preferable that these resources remain accurate, updated, and consistent across all sources [3]. The aim of the present study is to understand the accessibility to information regarding BII on the most popular medicine and health-related websites.

Materials and Methods

The web analytics engine SimilarWeb (New York, NY, USA) was queried to identify the 50 most popular websites in the categories of ‘Medicine’ and ‘Health’. One of these websites was a duplicate and therefore removed, leaving a total of 49 eligible websites. From these websites, 251 articles were identified that were related to BII.

An explicit definition of BII was provided in only 17 (41%) of the websites, and these definitions listed between 3 and 45 (mean: 3.6 ± 7.6) associated symptoms. Twelve of these 17 websites (70%) cited evidence-based literature, and 14 (80%) mentioned Breast Implant-Associated Anaplastic Large Cell Lymphoma (BIA-ALCL), the solid tumor-like hematologic malignancy that has been shown to develop in the capsule surrounding breast implants (Figure 2) [1,4]. Only 18 of the 251 articles on these websites (7%) listed actual treatment options for BII, with only 16 (6%) mentioning surgical removal as an option.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the information regarding BII available on the most popular

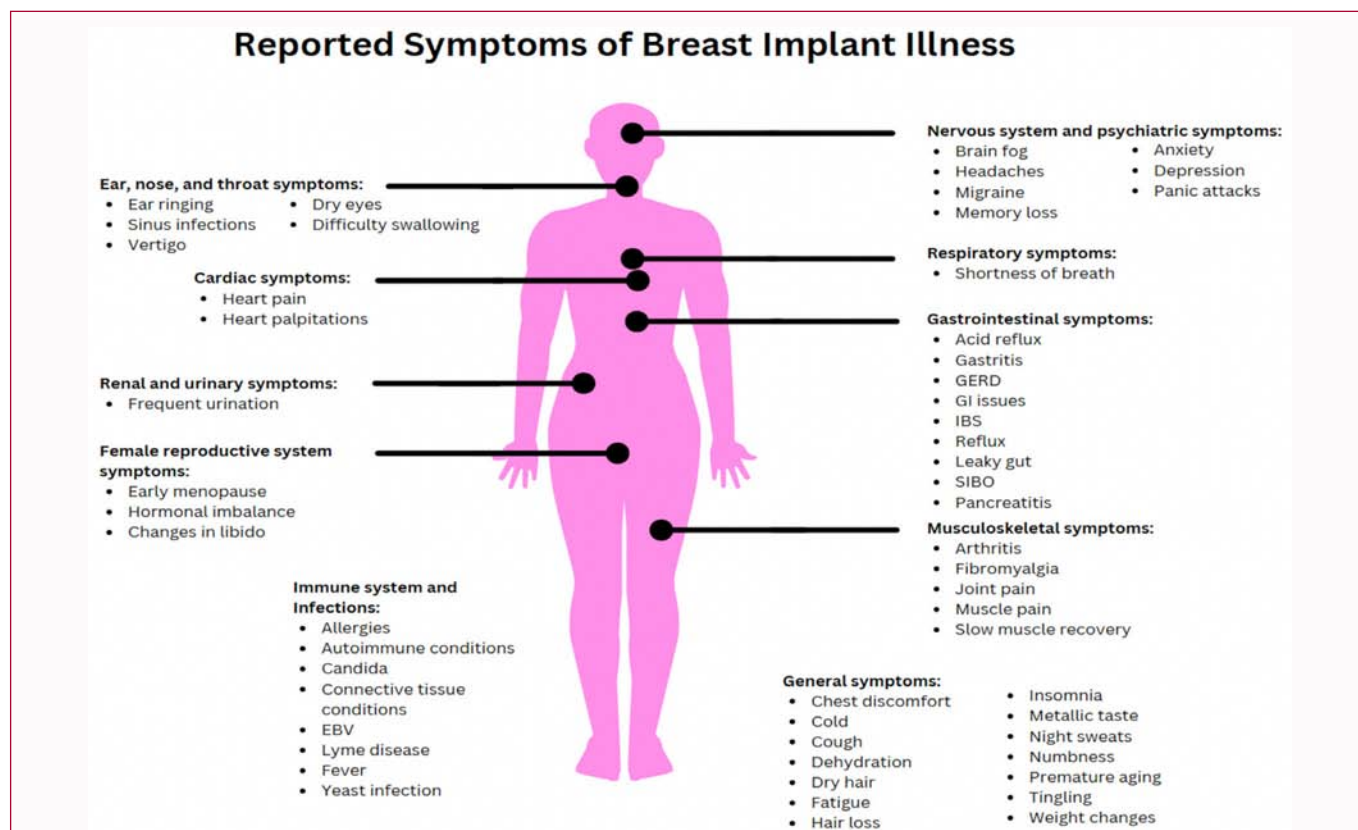
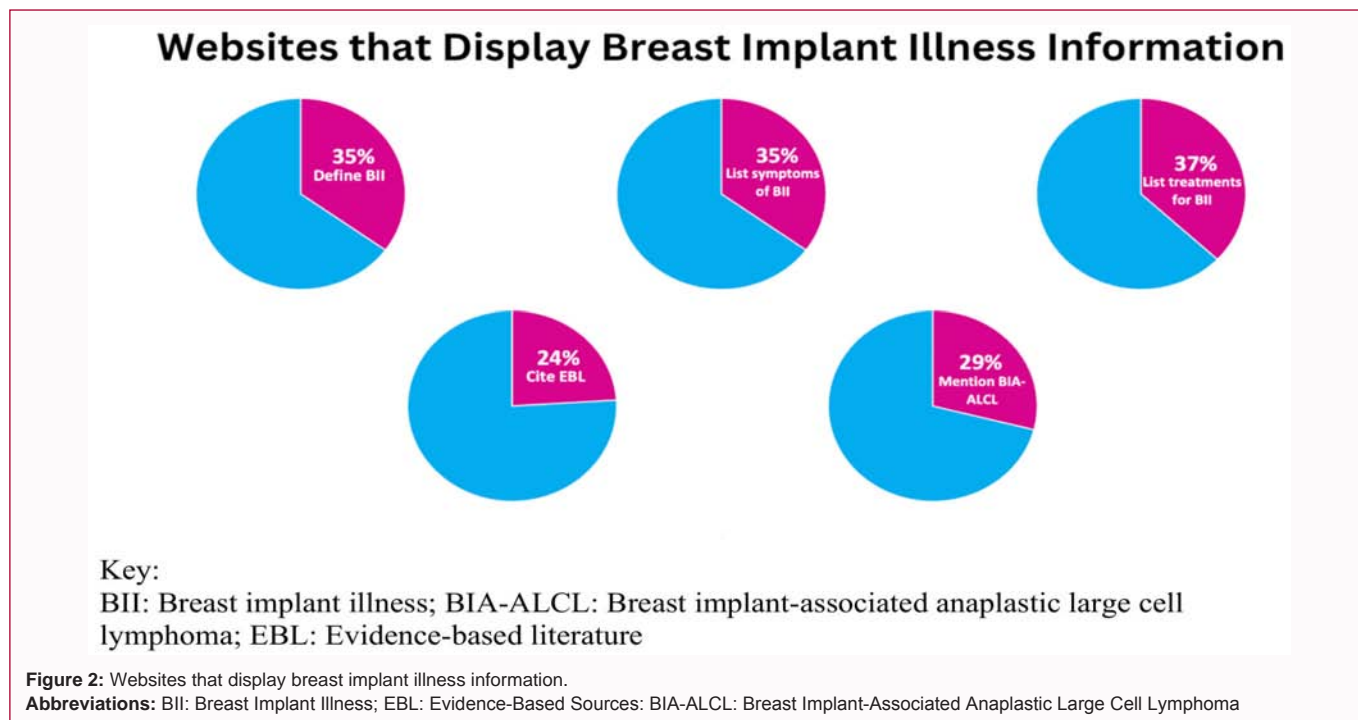


Figure 1: Reported symptoms of breast implant illness.

Abbreviations: EBV: Epstein-Barr Virus; GERD: Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease; GI: Gastrointestinal; IBS: Irritable Bowel Syndrome; SIBO: Small Intestinal Bacterial Overgrowth



medical websites is inconsistent and potentially unreliable, with only 17 out of 49 websites defining BII, and only 12 citing evidence-based literature. The vague and non-specific symptoms (such as fatigue, joint, and “brain fog”) make BII difficult to study in isolation, thus

contributing to the lack of consensus on a definition and diagnostic criteria of BII [2]. The incongruity of information regarding BII in the medical community and in the literature may be reflected in the wide variability of information on BII available on medicine and

health-related websites.

The absence of reliable and accurate medical information on health websites can harm patients who rely on the internet as a primary source of information. Inconsistent information can lead to confusion, anxiety, and inappropriate health-related decisions [3], highlighting the need for healthcare providers to offer accurate and reliable information on BII and to encourage patients to seek information from reputable sources. Providers should devote more time and resources to BII research to help guide management of patients with potential BII.

Conclusion

In conclusion, less than half of the queried websites that mention BII provide a definition of BII, possible treatment solutions, cite evidence-based sources, or mention risk of associated malignancy. While further research is needed to better understand the pathophysiology and symptoms of BII, it is crucial that patients have access to accurate and consistent medical information via online health-related platforms.

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