

# DISCERN: a questionnaire for judging the quality of written consumer health information

SECTION 1: IS THE PUBLICATION RELIABLE?
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## 1. Are the aims clear?

### RATING THIS QUESTION

No		Partially		Yes
1 <sup>+</sup>	2	3	4	5

**Hint:** Look for a clear indication at the beginning of the publication of

\* what it is about

\* what it is meant to cover (and what topics are meant to be excluded)

\* who might find it useful

**\*Rating note:** if the answer to Question 1 is No, go directly to Question 3.

## 2. Does it achieve its aims?

### RATING THIS QUESTION

No		Partially		Yes
1	2	3	4	5

**Hint:** Consider whether the publication provides the information it aimed to as outlined in Question 1

## 3. Is it relevant?

### RATING THIS QUESTION

No		Partially		Yes
1	2	3	4	5

**Hint:** Consider whether

- \* *the publication addresses the questions that readers might ask*
- \* *recommendations and suggestions concerning treatment choices are realistic or appropriate*

4. Is it clear what sources of information were used to compile the publication (other than the author or producer)?

**RATING THIS QUESTION**

No		Partially		Yes
1	2	3	4	5

**Hint:**

- \* check whether the main claims or statements made about treatment choices are accompanied by a reference to the sources used as evidence, e.g. a research study or expert opinion
- \* look for a means of checking the sources used such as a bibliography/reference list or the addresses of the experts or organisations quoted, or external links to the online sources

**Rating note: in order to score a full "5", the publication should fulfil both hints. Lists of additional sources of support and information (Question 7) are not necessarily sources of evidence for the current publication**

5. Is it clear when the information used or reported in the publication was produced?

**RATING THIS QUESTION**

No		Partially		Yes
1	2	3	4	5

**Hint:** Look for

- \* dates of the main sources of information used to compile the publication
- \* date of any revisions of the publication (but not dates of reprinting)
- \* date of publication (copyright date)

**Rating note: in order to score a full "5" the dates relating to the first hint should be found**

## 6. Is it balanced and unbiased?

### RATING THIS QUESTION

No		Partially		Yes
1	2	3	4	5

**Hint:** look for:

- \* a clear indication of whether the publication is written from a personal or objective perspective
- \* evidence that a range of sources of information was used to compile the publication, e.g. more than one research study or expert
- \* evidence of an external assessment of the publication

Be wary if:

- \* the publication focuses on the advantages or disadvantages of one particular treatment choice without reference to other possible choices
- \* the publication relies primarily on evidence from single cases (which may not be typical of people with this condition or of responses to a particular treatment)
- \* the information is presented in a sensational, emotive or alarmist way

## 7. Does it provide details of additional sources of support and information?

### RATING THIS QUESTION

No		Partially		Yes
1	2	3	4	5

**Hint:** Look for suggestions for further reading or for details of other organisations providing advice and information about the condition and treatment choices

## 8. Does it refer to areas of uncertainty?

### RATING THIS QUESTION

No		Partially		Yes
1	2	3	4	5

**Hint:**

- \* *Look for discussion of the gaps in knowledge or differences in expert opinion concerning treatment choices*
- \* *Be wary if the publication implies that a treatment choice affects everyone in the same way, e.g. 100% success rate with a particular treatment*

## SECTION 2: HOW GOOD IS THE QUALITY OF INFORMATION ON TREATMENT CHOICES?

**N.B.** The questions apply to the treatment (or treatments) described *in the publication*. Self-care is considered a form of treatment throughout this section.

**9. Does it describe how each treatment works?**

**RATING THIS QUESTION**

No		Partially		Yes
1	2	3	4	5

**Hint:** Look for a description of how a treatment acts on the body to achieve its effect

**10. Does it describe the benefits of each treatment?**

**RATING THIS QUESTION**

No		Partially		Yes
1	2	3	4	5

**Hint:** Benefits can include controlling or getting rid of symptoms, preventing recurrence of the condition and eliminating the condition, both short-term and long-term

**11. Does it describe the risks of each treatment?**

**RATING THIS QUESTION**

No		Partially		Yes
1	2	3	4	5

**Hint:** Risks can include side-effects, complications and adverse reactions to treatment both short-term and long-term

**12. Does it describe what would happen if no treatment is used?**

### RATING THIS QUESTION

No		Partially		Yes
1	2	3	4	5

***Hint:*** Look for a description of the risks and benefits of postponing treatment, of watchful waiting (i.e. monitoring how the condition progresses without treatment) or of permanently forgoing treatment

### 13. Does it describe how the treatment choices affect overall quality of life?

### RATING THIS QUESTION

No		Partially		Yes
1	2	3	4	5

***Hint:*** Look for

- \* description of the effects of the treatment choices on day-to-day activity
- \* description of the effects of the treatment choices on relationships with family, friends and carers

**14. Is it clear that there may be more than one possible treatment choice?**

**RATING THIS QUESTION**

No		Partially		Yes
1	2	3	4	5

***Hint:*** Look for:

- \* *a description of who is most likely to benefit from each treatment choice mentioned, and under what circumstances*
- \* *suggestions of alternatives to consider or investigate further (including choices not fully described in the publication) before deciding whether to select or reject a particular treatment choice*

**15. Does it provide support for shared decision-making?**

**RATING THIS QUESTION**

No		Partially		Yes
1	2	3	4	5

***Hint:*** look for suggestions of things to discuss with family, friends, doctors or other health professionals concerning treatment choices

<b>SECTION 3 OVERALL RATING OF THE PUBLICATION</b>
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**16. Based on the answers to all of the above questions, rate the overall quality of the publication as a source of information about treatment choices:**

**RATING THIS QUESTION**

Low	Moderate	High
Serious or extensive shortcomings	Potentially important but not serious shortcomings	Minimal shortcomings



1

2

3

4

5

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#### Disclaimer

DISCERN is a general, educational tool designed primarily to enable patients (or health consumers), their carers and advisers to select and use written information on treatment choices as part of good quality healthcare. The DISCERN instrument and any information selected using DISCERN is not intended to be and must not be used as a substitute for advice from a qualified health professional. The individuals, organisations and publishers involved in DISCERN accept no responsibility whatsoever for any claims, loss, damage or injury resulting from its improper use, including use in substitution for advice from a qualified health professional.