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News

Vaxes spark surprise questions 18.02.21 AM

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Australians have a range of burning questions about COVID-19 vaccines and are searching for answers on the internet but they are being fed incorrect and potentially dangerous content with the pharma industry missing a golden opportunity to counter with accurate, scientifically-based information.

A real time search listening webinar conducted by Brand Medicine International this week found Australians are looking for answers on a range of vaccine related topics, many of which were surprising.

Among those concerned about the infectious nature of the virus, a common question asked related to whether the side effects or "symptoms" of vaccination are contagious.

"People are obviously really anxious about contagion of this disease, so much so that they are genuinely concerned that even the side effects of the vaccine are contagious," Brand Medicine International CEO Julia Walsh said.

"This is a great example of where people have a genuine need for knowledge, yet they are probably too embarrassed to ask their doctor, or friends on social media for fear of looking stupid - so they turn to Google, which is anonymous and never judges."

Some of the vaccine related questions being asked by Australians include:

- Can I drink alcohol with the vaccine?
- Can I take ibuprofen with the vaccine?
- Are vaccine symptoms contagious?
- Are vaccine companies liable for damages?
- Are vaccine passports legal?
- Is parental consent needed for vaccine?
- Does vaccine feel like a hangover?
- Does vaccine cause hair loss?
- Are vaccine vials recyclable?
- AstraZeneca new strain?

There were also many questions related to pregnancy and the suitability of the vaccines for those with pre-existing medical conditions.

Completely wrong

The problem, according to Walsh, are not the questions - but rather the answers that are served up during searches using Google or other search engines which can be completely wrong and contribute to vaccine hesitancy or worse - refusal.

Content provided by anti-vaxers, bloggers, conspiracy theorists and the ill-informed can often rank higher than legitimate pharma industry information.

Not once during the real time search webinar did the Pfizer, AstraZeneca or Novavax websites appear in page one searches in answer to these questions and official Australian Government health information turned up infrequently or far down the page.

"This just means no one (in pharma) has thought that people are going to be asking that question - so no one's created content to respond to it," Walsh said.

"But people could follow a search query through and get information that absolutely 100 per cent deters them from wanting to take the vaccine. So what we need to do as an industry is make sure that there's balanced patient-responsive content available that gives them context, that reassures them.

"The key takeaway is, if we are not listening to the questions, we are not, as an industry, turning up in the responses.

"Tracking and knowing the real-world questions is imperative to ensuring locally relevant, evidence-based responses are offered."

Search listening uncovers the long form questions that people are putting into Google and other search engines, revealing what information they need. According to Walsh, pharma companies can use this information to respond with scientific fact to people's hunger for answers.

She said pharma companies are missing the opportunity to connect with patients by not exploring what they are asking and in the case of vaccines, providing information that could allay people's concerns and help boost vaccine uptake. By creating content that answers the specific questions people are putting into Google, pharma company responses would appear on page one of any internet search.

Christine Spiteri

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