

Background

Healthcare professionals and the public are increasingly turning to the Internet as a source of health information due to its convenience and accessibility (1-4).

eHealth literacy can be defined as the extent of an individual's ability to access, process, understand and appraise fundamental health information and services required to make wise health decisions (1, 3, 4). As future pharmacists, pharmacy students must have high eHealth literacy and skills to look for, comprehend, evaluate and appraise health information available on electronic sources to deliver better pharmaceutical services that prioritise optimal patient outcomes.

The aim of this study was to investigate the level of eHealth literacy amongst pharmacy students at a Malaysian public university.

Introduction

Rapid growth and development of information technology has significantly impacted the healthcare system. In the digital era, the Internet has become one of the primary sources of health information (2). However, the credibility of the information obtained on the Internet may be an issue which could lead to false health information, resulting in poor health decisions and, thus, poor health outcomes.

Good eHealth literacy will empower patients and healthcare practitioners, including pharmacists, to make decisions and engage in public health and wellness. Currently, there is only one study on the eHealth literacy of pharmacy students in Malaysia (1). Due to the dearth of studies, we aimed to investigate the level of eHealth literacy amongst pharmacy students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Puncak Alam using the validated eHealth Literacy Scale (eHEALS) instrument (4).

Materials and Methods

This is a cross-sectional survey study that was conducted from March to May 2023 at UiTM Puncak Alam using the questionnaire adapted from Blebil et al. (1). The questionnaire in Google Forms was distributed to all pharmacy students at the Faculty of Pharmacy UiTM Puncak Alam. A total of 254 respondents completed the questionnaire. This work presents preliminary data on pharmacy students' demographics and eHEALS score from Year 1 to Year 4.

This undergraduate research project was granted the ethical approval from UiTM Research Ethics Committee (REC(PH)/UG/072/2023).

Results and Discussion

Table 1 and 2 show that 31.1% of the respondents were Year 3 students. Most owned both smartphones and tablets (84.6%). The median eHEALS score of the participants was 32 ± 2.0 (interquartile range, IQR) (out of 40). Based on the results, the participants demonstrated high eHEALS score, which was greater than the previous study (1) that reported a median of 31 ± 3.0 (IQR) among Malaysian pharmacy students in private and public universities.

Table 1: Brief descriptive statistics of the survey respondents (n=254)

Year of Study	%
Year 1	26.4
Year 2	22.4
Year 3	31.1
Year 4	20.1

Table 2: Ownership of mobile devices (n=254)

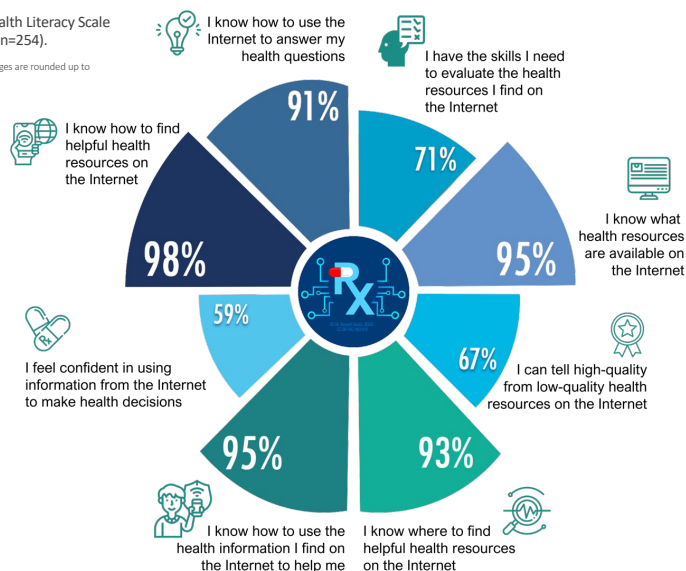
Which device do you own?	%
Smartphones only	15.4
Smartphones and tablets	84.6



Figure 1 illustrates the eHEALS score of pharmacy students at UiTM. The majority of students indicated they knew how (98.4%), what (94.9%) and where (93.3%) to find helpful online health resources. Most agreed or strongly agreed that they knew how to use online health information to help themselves. One-third of the students, however, indicated that they lacked the skill to evaluate and distinguish quality health resources on the Internet. These findings were consistent with the previous studies (1,3). The high level of eHealth literacy could be attributed to the familiarity of the younger generation with technology and greater internet access.

Figure 1: eHealth Literacy Scale (eHEALS) (4) (n=254).

Note: the percentages are rounded up to the nearest integer.



Conclusion

Our study found that UiTM pharmacy students demonstrated high eHealth literacy. However, they were still experiencing difficulties in evaluating and applying online health information. Training programmes for improving students' eHealth literacy, such as Internet usage skills, are therefore crucial. Ideally, the programmes should begin at the university to enhance student skills and confidence in the appraisal and curation of health information for better patient outcomes in the digital era.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interests. This research did not receive any financial support.

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