

THE STORY OF THE #EPIDURAL AS TOLD BY INSTAGRAM

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BACKGROUND

In February 2021, 72 percent of US adults used some form of social media¹. Specifically, 78 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds use Instagram. A recent survey stated 92 percent of women believe health information should be available on social media, and over 50 percent of women found social media helpful in making healthcare decisions². Although there have been multiple cross-sectional studies assessing the accuracy and quality of information on different social media platforms, there have been no assessments of the quality and accuracy of information surrounding epidurals on Instagram.

METHODS

A cross-sectional study using descriptive content analysis was performed. A new account was used to search for reels with the hashtag #epidural on Instagram. The top 100 videos were downloaded at a single time in February 2025. The number of likes, comments, shares, and views were noted.

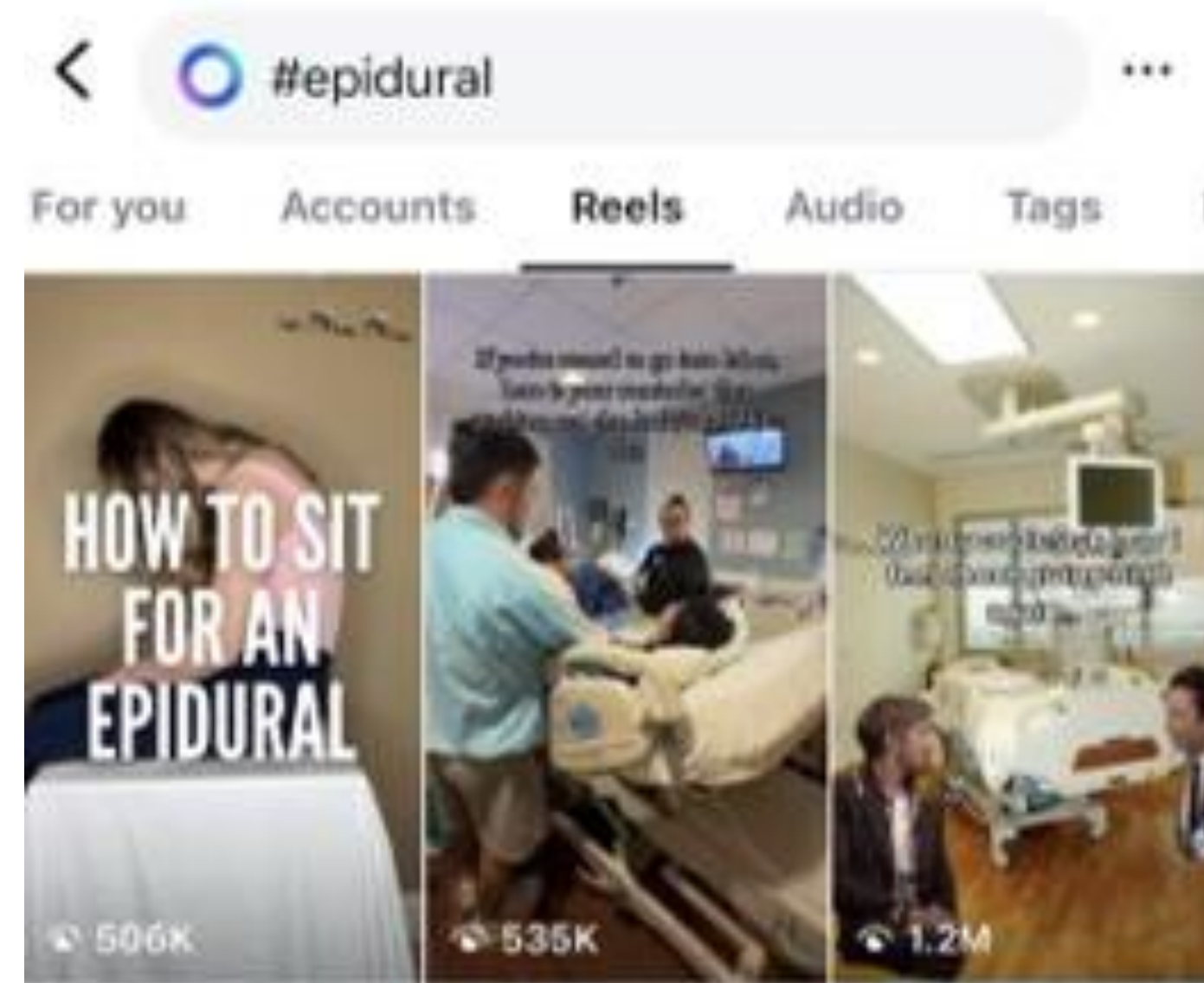


Figure 1: New Instagram account with #epidural search on reels.

Two independent reviewers, both medical professionals in OBGYN, completed a survey of video characteristics and quality assessment using validated modified DISCERN³ (mDISCERN) and Global Quality Scale⁴ (GQS). A third reviewer disputed the differences. Descriptive statistics were used to describe engagement and content. Interrater reliability was assessed using Cohen's Kappa.

RESULTS

Engagement: The reels had a median of 191,500 views, 408 shares and 3,339 likes.

Type of User/Creator: Most users were independent (38%) or health coaches (27%), with only 25% clinicians and 8% companies.

Type & Tone of Video: Most videos were educational (45%) or reactions (31%). 18% were humorous. Nearly a quarter (24%) had a negative tone and only 15% had a positive tone.

Compelling Factors: Almost half (46%) used catchy music, 18% used some sort of audio-visual supplementation and 30% used humor



Figure 2: Screenshots of example Instagram videos.

- 18% had product advertisement
- 22% explicitly discussed a negative experience
- 22% discussed side effects
- 10% explicitly recommended epidural, 12% explicitly recommended against epidural
- Only 1/100 videos had a medical disclaimer

RESULTS CONT.

Quality & Reliability of Content: The mean mDISCERN was 1.49 (SD 0.85) and the mean GQS was 2.23 (SD 1.10).

The mDISCERN scale receives 1 point for each:

- Are the video's aims clear, concise, and achieved?
- Are valid and reliable sources cited?
- Is the information discussed balanced and unbiased?
- Are additional sources of information listed for patient reference?
- Does the video address areas of controversy and uncertainty?



The GQS mean of 2.23 signified that the videos had generally poor quality and flow, some information given, but of limited use to patients.



CONCLUSION

Information on epidurals on Instagram is generally poor quality and flow, with some information given but ultimately of limited use to patients. Understanding the quality of content on social media can aid healthcare providers in counseling patients and identify ways to meaningfully engage with patients on these platforms.

REFERENCES

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- *Full list of references available on request