

Title: The Story of the #Epidural as told by Instagram

Background: 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 decisions. There have been no assessments of the quality and accuracy of information surrounding epidurals on Instagram.

Objective: To examine the quality of information and attitudes on epidural use during labor of the top video reels trending on Instagram in February 2025.

Methods: A cross-sectional study using descriptive content analysis. 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. Two independent reviewers, both medical professionals in OBGYN, completed a survey of video characteristics and quality assessment using validated modified DISCERN (mDISCERN) and Global Quality Scale (GQS). A third reviewer disputed the differences. Descriptive statistics were used to describe engagement and content. Interrater reliability was assessed using Cohen's Kappa. The quality and reliability of the content were analyzed using GQS and mDISCERN.

Results: The reels had a median of 191,500 views, 408 shares and 3,339 likes. Most users were independent (38%) or health coaches (27%), with only one fourth clinicians. Most videos were educational (45%) or reactions (31%). Nearly a quarter (24%) had a negative tone, only 15% had a positive tone, and 17% displayed distrust of healthcare professionals. The mean GQS was 2.23 (SD 1.10) and the mean mDISCERN was 1.49 (SD 0.85). Overall, epidural content on Instagram has fairly low quality and reliability, with only 1/100 videos having a medical disclaimer.

Conclusion: 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.