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Reddit for Redness: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of the r/Rosacea Forum

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INTRODUCTION

Patients are increasingly turning to social media for disease/treatment advice and support.[1] This has varying benefits[2] but involves the risk of inaccurate information.[3,4] Reddit, a news/social content discussion platform site with 1.1 billion active monthly members, hosts numerous dermatology "subReddit" forums dedicated to dermatologic advice/education/treatment experience.[4,5] Rosacea, an inflammatory dermatosis affecting 2% to 22% percent of fair-skinned individuals[6] and up to 10% of individuals in regions with predominantly skin of color populations,[7] has its own subReddit, r/Rosacea, with 74,000 active users. This study analyzes r/Rosacea and its alignment with National Rosacea Society (NRS) standard management options.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

On 6/30/24, the "top" r/Rosacea "help" posts were filtered for the past year (6/30/23–6/30/24). Three authors (JK, RA, UN) extracted each post's text, number of upvotes, percentage of upvotes (upvotes/total votes), and ≤10 non-deleted comments with >1 upvote. Posts were excluded if they were "[deleted]", commentless, had "0" upvotes, or had "deleted" authors. Posts were categorized as "emotional support," "product recommendation/guidance request," "first time diagnosis inquiry," "diagnosis follow-up inquiry," or "other," and then mined for sub-topics. Comments for all the first-time diagnosis posts and the top 10 diagnosis follow-up inquiry posts were evaluated for alignment with the standard management options published by the NRS Expert Committee[8] and assigned a grade of A, B, or C (Table 2).

RESULTS

The final analysis included 185 posts and 74 comments. Posts were primarily in the "treatment/regimen experiences" category (48.65%), followed by "diagnosis follow-up inquiry" (19.46%), and "product recommendation/guidance request" (16.22%). The top 5 subtopics were "redness/flushing," "negative social/emotional/functional effects," "moisturizer/moisturizing," "triggers/exacerbating factors," and "bumps/papules/acneiform lesions" (Table 1).

TABLE 1.

Top Categories and Subtopics of Posts	
Category	**Number of Posts (%)***
Treatment/regimen experiences	90 (48.65%)
Diagnosis follow-up inquiry	36 (19.46%)
Product recommendation/guidance requests	30 (16.22%)
Emotional support	15 (8.11%)
Other	10 (5.41%)
First time diagnosis inquiry	4 (2.16%)
Top 15 Subtopics of Posts†	**n**
Redness/flushing	81
Negative social/emotional/functional effects	55
Moisturizer/ moisturizing	53
Triggers/exacerbating factors	51
Bumps/papules/acneiform lesions	45
Ivermectin	45
Routine/non-diet lifestyle modifications/ specifications	45
Cleansing	42
Sun protection/SPF	38
Burning/stinging/pain/discomfort	32
Azelaic acid	31
Treatment cost	31
Type 2/papulopustular rosacea	31
Diet/dietary mods	26
Dry/dehydrated/flaky/peeling skin	24

*Number of posts included in final analysis = 185 of 224 retrieved posts
†Each post could have multiple subtopics (eg, negative emotional effect from redness)
• *Management/treatment/regimen experiences:* People describe products/routines/treatments that worked for them in managing their rosacea.
• *Emotional support:* Offering or asking for emotional support/coping mechanisms.
• *Product recommendation/guidance requests:* Question relating to a specific product/combination/class of product (including device-based treatment)/medications.
• *First-time diagnosis inquiry:* They specifically allude to or note in the post that they have not seen a dermatologist yet.
• *Diagnosis follow up inquiry* (including requests for alternative management): Known or presumed rosacea with follow-up questions

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TABLE 2.

Grades and Upvotes of Top First-Time Diagnosis and Diagnosis Follow-Up Posts	
First-Time Diagnosis Posts	
Net upvotes, average (range)	16.5 (16–17)
Percent upvote, average (range)	90.5% (79–100%)
Comments receiving grade A	4
Comments receiving grade B	14
Comments receiving grade C	7
Upvotes of all grade A+B recommendations vs all grade C recommendations, average	6.5 vs 3.86 (P = 0.15)
Top 10 Diagnosis Follow-Up Posts	
Net upvotes, average (range)	41.8 (30–77)
Percent upvote, average (range)	94.4% (88–100%)
Comments receiving grade A	4
Comments receiving grade B	26
Comments receiving grade C	19
Upvotes of all grade A+B recommendations vs. all grade C recommendations, average	9.37 vs 8.05 (P = 0.63)

- A → All recommendations in the comment completely consider AAD rosacea standard management options (ie, 100% evidence- based medicine).
- B → Recommendations in comment partially consider AAD standard management options (ie, may include some information aligned with them, but were either missing parts of the recommendations or included recommendations not in the guidelines)
- C → Recommendations do not include any information in the standard management options (eg, anecdotal)

For first-time diagnosis posts, upvotes for comments with grades of A+B were on average non-significantly higher than Grade C (6.5 vs 3.86, *P*=0.15). For follow-up posts, comments with grades of A+B had more upvotes than Grade C comments, although the difference was not statistically significant (9.37 vs 8.05, *P*=0.63). This indicates a similar level of engagement between recommendations of varying quality, raising concerns for the limited ability to distinguish high-quality recommendations from low-quality ones.

DISCUSSION

Limitations include cross-sectional design, one-year post filter, and possible post/comment deletion during analysis. Additionally, there is a certain degree to which self-moderation occurs, and posts/comments inconsistent with guidelines could have been less engaged with and subsequently excluded. Also, Grade B encompasses many comments slightly deviating from guidelines, making a granular analysis challenging.

Increases in wait times to see dermatologists and trends in healthcare as a whole have led to patients seeking alternate sources of information and support for their diagnosis. Barriers to care offer an opportunity to seek out community support that could be both helpful and flawed simultaneously.[9] This study offers insight into the variable quality of user-generated content about Rosacea on Reddit, highlighting the need for improved patient education to help assess dermatological recommendation/advice quality. Dermatologists can leverage this to anticipate diagnosis and treatment expectations and guide patients toward reliable information sources. This could include expanding medical society-social media platform partnerships to verify and highlight professional inputs to help ensure that patients receive both accurate and beneficial advice within the context of large-scale online support communities.

DISCLOSURES

JWM has served as an advisory board member for Castle Biosciences, La Roche-Posay, Ferndale Healthcare, Doximity, Inc, as a consultant for Blair & Jack, CeraVe, and has received research grants from La Roche-Posay, AAD. JWM also serves as Chief Clinical Advisor for Berman Medical, LLC. JK, RA, UN, WMR have no relevant conflicts of interest or disclosures.

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