



Birth plans? Where are our patients getting them? What do the most common sources of information say?



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Introduction

The birth of a child is a pivotal time in the life of a mother and her family. The health and well being of a mother and child at birth largely determines the future health and wellness of the entire family.

Between 9.1 – 45.5% of women describe their delivery as traumatic.¹¹ The most common reasons include a loss of control and inability to participate in decision-making.

The birth plan was conceived in the 1980s for patients to engage their healthcare providers in discussion and to articulate their birth preferences. However, there are few formal guides for women to set a birth plan, and the Internet is increasingly seen as a primary source of information.

These sources tend to neglect the unpredictable nature of the intrapartum period and a deviation from a unilaterally derived detailed birth plan can be traumatising to a patient.

Methods and Materials

An Internet search with the keywords “birth plans” and “pregnancy” in the popular search engines.

The top websites were reviewed for categories¹² including Accuracy, Authority, Objectivity, Currency and Coverage. Each aspect was rated between A (highest rating) to C (lowest rating).

Two researchers independently reviewed the 10 websites according to the strict criteria, and any discrepancies were discussed and resolved.

The websites were also reviewed to ensure they covered pertinent topics related to good birth plans, including antenatal classes, birth companions, analgesia, fetal heart rate monitoring, augmentation, induction of labour, episiotomy, caesarean sections, internal examinations, postnatal care and unexpected situations.

Results (Grades → A > B > C)¹²

	Accuracy	Authority	Objectivity	Currency	Coverage	Content	Overall
Pregnancy, Birth & Baby ¹ (NSW Health)	B	C	C	A	A	B	B
Better Health Channel ² (Vic Dept of Health)	C	C	C	A	B	A	B
The Healthy Mummy ³	C	A	A	C	A	A	B
Web MD ⁴	A	B	B	B	C	B	B
What To Expect ⁵	B	C	A	B	C	A	B
Kids Health ⁶ (Nemours)	B	B	B	A	C	B	B
Parents ⁷	B	B	A	C	A	C	A
Baby Centre ⁸	B	B	B	B	A	A	A
The Bump ⁹	C	C	A	B	C	C	C
Cleveland Clinic ¹⁰	C	C	C	B	A	A	B

Objective

To assess the quality of information provided by the most publically accessible websites with regards to information about the birth process, and formulation of a birth plan.

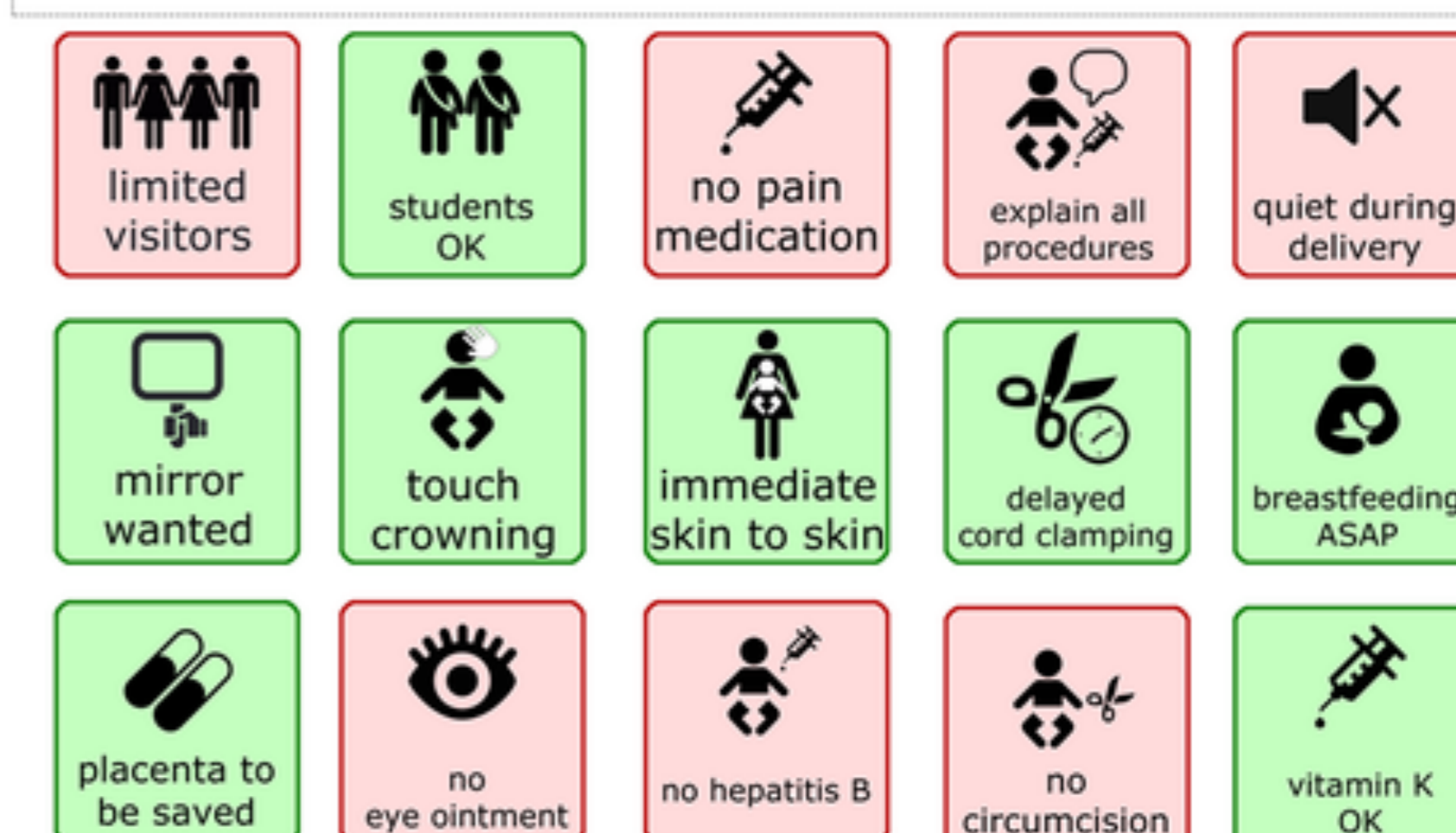


Figure 1. Depicting an example of an internet sourced birth plan

Discussion

These are the 10 most common websites available to the general public when searching the internet for information on pregnancy birth plans.

Some sites are from official healthcare related departments or institutions,^{1,2,4,6,10} while others are from private corporations.^{3,5,7,8,9} However, the level of reliability and content available vary widely as depicted above.

Each source varies in its reliability, content and biasness. A single patient will find it challenging to obtain all her required information from any single website.

Conclusions

The websites that are most accessible to patients are of varying quality and content.

Many websites may be written by unnamed authors, or authors from non-healthcare backgrounds, which may give a personal bias.

This might be an issue, especially for the frontline healthcare practitioner with patients who obtain their information solely from certain sources.

An easily accessible and more reliable source of information on the internet should be available for patients.

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