

**Summary of Research of Nocole Dalmer  
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Dr. Peter N. McCracken Legacy Scholarship**

**Objectives:** This study examined informal caregivers' perceptions of the reliability of older adult health information retrieved through online platforms. As health information is increasingly sought through an online platform, a greater understanding of the information needs of these lay information mediaries is essential to inform evidence-based library and information science practices.

**Methods:** A sample of Canadian informal caregivers possessing previous experience using online platforms to access older adult health information was studied. Five informal caregivers responded to advertisements posted on online caregiver communities and agreed to semi-structured telephone interviews. The overall intention and focus of the study on informal caregivers' perceptions called for a phenomenological methodology. In line with phenomenological approaches, transcriptions were analyzed using constant comparison method, allowing for the identification of emerging patterns and themes.

**Results:** Informal caregivers' searches are internally motivated, are self-initiated, and occur only in the presence of a catalyst, often a change in the older adult's health. Caregivers use personal and professional experiences to shape and guide their searching processes and choose to store information found, not sharing it with the older adult. Most reliability markers were found to either explicitly increase or decrease caregivers' trust in the found information, whereas a few markers were generally found to have little to no effect on the caregivers' perceptions of trust. Overwhelmingly, caregivers were found to make active, internal reliability evaluations. In assessing a website's reliability, caregivers compared information found to information on other sites and to information already known. This active filtration of reliability markers was based on past experiences and perceptions (both professional and personal) and often evolved into a habitual process.

**Conclusions:** Reliability assessments of online health information are complex and have many qualities that vary depending on the caregivers' past experiences. Future studies could replicate the current study with a larger sample size and with a sample of older adults with varying degrees of cognitive capabilities. Findings from this study carry implications for the library community. Librarians must be aware of informal caregivers as hidden patients, recognizing that their information behaviours, including reliability assessments, are composites of past experiences and may not follow a linear search trajectory.