

Here are this week's health care news highlights from AskaPatient:

- Brigham and Women's Hospital is developing a blood test that can predict risk of spontaneous preterm birth. <http://ow.ly/TFti30nUgOf> (03-04-19)
- New hospital sanitation system cuts hospital acquired infections in half. <http://ow.ly/ICKG30nUgPG> (03-04-19)
- Analysis finds an indirect link between childhood poverty and inflammation, possibly through riskier behavior. <http://ow.ly/2Vkx30nUgVc> (03-04-19)
- High-fat diet changes bacterial environment in the gut, leading to a worse immune system response. <http://ow.ly/kMer30nUj0D> (03-05-19)
- Having more muscle mass greatly improves the odds of favorable cancer treatment outcomes. <http://ow.ly/W5oH30nVb5V> (03-05-19)
- Medicare is planning a payment system that would encourage cheaper and more effective dialysis treatments. <http://ow.ly/uiNz30nVb6M> (03-05-19)
- Radiation immediately after surgery triples survival of children with a certain type of brain tumor. <http://ow.ly/X06i30nVb75> (03-06-19)
- London man is pronounced HIV-free after 18 months of remission, marking the world's second-ever case. <http://ow.ly/gR3E30nVYwx> (03-06-19)
- Alcohol, drug, and suicide deaths continue to climb, with the most recent rates the highest since record keeping began. <http://ow.ly/KWNz30nVYMH> (03-06-19)
- Self-sterilizing microneedles offer safer, painless vaccinations and drug delivery. <http://ow.ly/4Unw30nVZa1> (03-07-19)
- Fungus common in hair follicles is also found in the gut, possible link to intestinal disorders such as Crohn's. <http://ow.ly/6Piw30nVZem> (03-07-19)
- Exposure to infections in the womb may increase a child's risk of autism and depression. <http://ow.ly/h92c30nWTWt> (03-07-19)
- Many diabetics say Eli Lilly's half-price insulin is still too much, citing cheaper prices for the same drug in other countries. <http://ow.ly/B2X830nWU53> (03-08-19)
- FDA approves J&J's nasal spray for treatment-resistant depression, which comes with a warning for high risk of abuse. <http://ow.ly/qZf530nWULp> (03-08-19)
- Could an Alzheimer's treatment be hiding in certain foods in our diet? <http://ow.ly/seuG30nXX4z> (03-08-19)
- Purdue University scientists describe method that makes continuous manufacturing possible to reduce drug shortages. <http://ow.ly/YzGI30nXX9m> (03-09-19)
- Taking a midday nap can lower blood pressure as much as reducing salt and alcohol intake. <http://ow.ly/AW6f30nXXaW> (03-09-19)

Next week: a look at drug-induced RLS (restless leg syndrome)

Recent surprise news from the FDA:

This week, Scott Gottlieb resigned from his position as FDA Commissioner, effective in one month. No announcement has yet been posted on the FDA web site. This [StatNews article](#) by Matthew Herper and Adam Feuerstein includes a copy of his resignation letter.

Patient Medication Guides and Patient Privacy Policies: Understandable or Not?

A recent study by researchers at the University of Victoria examined the readability of privacy policies for 300 popular web sites in England

and Ireland, including the giants Google, YouTube, and Amazon. Under the new "GDPR" data privacy regulations, meant to protect consumers in Europe, web sites are required to use "**clear and plain language**" in their privacy agreements, and must obtain informed consent from users if they want to collect data from site visitors.

While text written at a seventh or eighth grade reading level is considered to be acceptable for a consumer audience, researchers found that the readability of the sites' lengthy and often incomprehensible privacy policies have not changed much since the implementation of GDPR in May of 2018. They found that the average privacy policy requires its readers to have **more than 13 years of formal education**, not eight.

How do **patient medication guides, pharmacy privacy policies**, and other prescription-related information meant for the consumer rate in terms of readability? We put a small sample of patient medication guides and pharmacy privacy policies to the test, using the "Flesch-Kincaid" readability assessment. This test is based on the average number of words per sentence and the average number of syllables per word, and is a proofing tool available within the Microsoft Word word processing application. On average, patient medication guides in our sample were written at a ninth grade reading level and tended to be about five pages long.

Certain types of information, such as clinical trials data on side effects, are not included in patient medication guides. For that information, the patient must turn to the official drug label, which is longer and more complex, often requiring **college-level** reading skills. Here are the readability results for our sample of U.S. documents:

Readability of Drug Information

Medication Guides	Level	Length
Abilify - bipolar	10.6	6 pages
Lexapro - depression	9.2	6 pages
Prolia - osteoporosis	7.8	4.5 pages
Tamiflu - flu	8.8	3.5 pages
Xarelto -blood thinner	9.5	5 pages
Product Labels		
Tamiflu Official Label	15.6	39 pages
Lexapro Official Label	15.9	42 pages
Xarelto Official Label	14.1	59 pages
Pharmacy Privacy Policies		
CVS	12.6	5.5 pages
Walgreen	11.6	3 pages
Rite Aid, with state info	15.7	14 pages
Rite Aid, basic	12.8	5 pages
Costco	13.6	7 pages
Walmart	11.2	6 pages

Note: Reading levels were calculated using Flesch-Kinkade Reading Level tool. Walmart Patient Privacy Policy includes "Patient Bill of Rights."

Sources and more reading on this topic:

- Medication guides and product labels were obtained from [Drugs@FDA](#) database or [DailyMed](#) database, National Library of Medicine
- Pharmacy patient privacy policies were obtained from pharmacy patient inserts or pharmacy web sites.
- Study: *Law in Books and Law in Action: [The Readability of Privacy Policies and the GDPR](#)* by Shmuel Becher and Uri Benoliel. March 6, 2019.
- The following article, "Should online users be bound by their privacy agreements?" provides highlights of the study: [Conversation.com](#)
- What are medication guides and how are they different from "Consumer Medication Information?" [FDA Consumer Updates](#)

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