

Formatting Print on OTC Drug Labels to Benefit Seniors' Knowledge Acquisition Performance

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ABSTRACT

This research examines consumers' ability to acquire information from a simulated OTC medication bottle. Twelve otherwise identical OTC drug bottles were compared that had back labels which varied in (a) print size, (b) amount of white space between text, and (c) label design (standard vs. extended/pull-out). A no back label condition served as a control. Seniors (mean age = 78 years, SD = 7.4) and undergraduate students were given one of the 12 bottles and asked to perform one of two information acquisition tasks: (a) they examined the bottle for 3 minutes and then completed a questionnaire with the bottle was absent or (b) they answered the same questionnaire while the bottle was present. The undergraduates' performance in both information acquisition tasks was significantly better than the seniors for all label conditions except the control condition where both groups' low performance did not differ. Seniors' performance was significantly better in the medium and large print conditions than in the small print. Seniors' performance in the small print conditions did not differ from the control condition. Undergraduates showed no performance differences among the different small print conditions. No substantial effects of white space were found. For both participant groups, performance was better when the questionnaire was present compared to absent (i.e., recall from memory). While undergraduates' knowledge acquisition was unaffected by print size, the seniors performance was aided by the extended/pull-out label which allowed the use of medium and large print. Given that seniors comprise a large and increasing proportion of the population and they use more OTC medications compared to other age groups, extended label designs allowing larger print should be used.