

Healthline and Wolfram Alpha Expand Health and Treatment Research Tools

[Rob D. Young](#), December 16, 2011

Healthline and Wolfram Alpha have both announced new features specifically related to consumer health information. Healthline now offers a social search feature that taps into crowd sourced information on drug experiences while Wolfram Alpha taps into a rich compilation of clinical data.

Healthline's Treato-Powered Social Search

[Healthline](#) raised \$14 million for their vertical search engine for research on medical treatments, [last year](#) and have since been pushing forward within an opportunity to [socialize health](#). Thanks to a recent partnership, they are now expanding their database to include social feedback on treatment options.

Users hunting through the Healthline database will now see a link labeled "People's Comments about [[drug name]]." They can then see feedback that covers the reasons for taking the medication, the effectiveness, and the side effects. The data comes from feedback posted by, in most cases, thousands of users.

Learn more about Adderall



AMPHETAMINE; DEXTROAMPHETAMINE(am FET a meen; dex troe am FET a meen) is used to treat attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). It may also be used for narcolepsy. Federal law prohibits giving this medicine to any person other than the per...

[Side Effects](#)

[Interactions](#)

[Drug Interaction Checker for Adderall](#)

[Dosage](#)

[Compare Drugs Tool for Adderall](#)

[People's Comments about Adderall](#)

The expansive database is available at launch thanks to Treato, a First Life Research company that compiles feedback on drug side effects. The Treato website was launched in September of this year, and (according to a First Life Research statement) "analyzes patient discussions about drugs and medical conditions on blogs and forums, aggregating them into a single, clear and highly accessible knowledge base."

First Life Research's data comes from all corners of the web. That does also mean, though, that the compiled data may be pulling key terms inaccurately; a "Toporol XL" search, for example, shows heart palpitations as a side effect when they are, in fact, the reason for taking the medication. To further evaluate the data, though, users can click through to the original posting.

"The joint offering is the first to help consumers make sense of what patients are saying about their health in social media and to bring the patient's voice to life," said Gideon Mantel, CEO of First Life Research. West Shell, Healthline's CEO, feels similarly – emphasizing that "Health care is inherently social," and should thus be taking advantage of advancements in social technology from recent years.

Wolfram Alpha Gets an Expanded Database

[Wolfram Alpha](#), which attempts to give users responses to queries by gathering the information of the web and physical world into concrete data, is also going deeper into the health industry. Their recently uploaded dataset includes health and drug information "including commonly reported symptoms, co-occurring diseases, and lab tests used for diagnosis," according to a [recent announcement](#).

Result:

[More classes](#)
[Hide drugs](#)
[Fewer drugs](#)
[More drugs](#)
[Brand name drugs](#)
[Primary diagnosis at visit](#)

therapeutic class	drug	male	female	all
coumarins and indandiones	Coumadin	32%	32%	32%
	Warfarin	16%	6.7%	12%
	Jantoven	0.2%	0.6%	0.4%
cardioselective beta blockers	Toprol XL	14%	15%	15%
	Atenolol	7.7%	5.8%	6.8%
	Metoprolol	7%	4.2%	5.6%
platelet aggregation inhibitors	Aspirin	16%	12%	14%
	A.S.A.	8.4%	7.1%	7.7%
	Plavix	3.2%	2.2%	2.7%

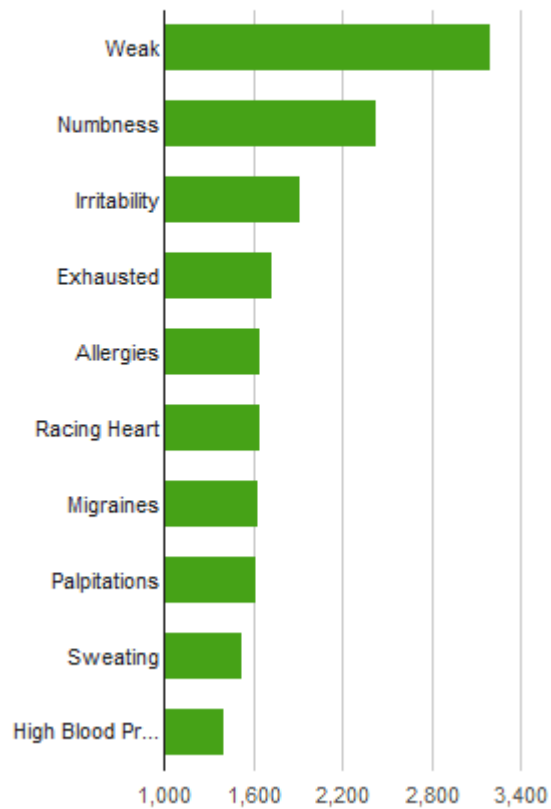
Patients can also tap into this database to get information on how common different treatments are. A search for "tachycardia drug treatments," for example, tells us that coumadins and indandiones are the most common drug used for cardiac dysrhythmias like tachycardia, with 43% of patients being treated with this class of drug. In addition to exploring other drug-class options, you can get a full breakdown of the medication types used and the generic alternatives.

The Empowered Patient

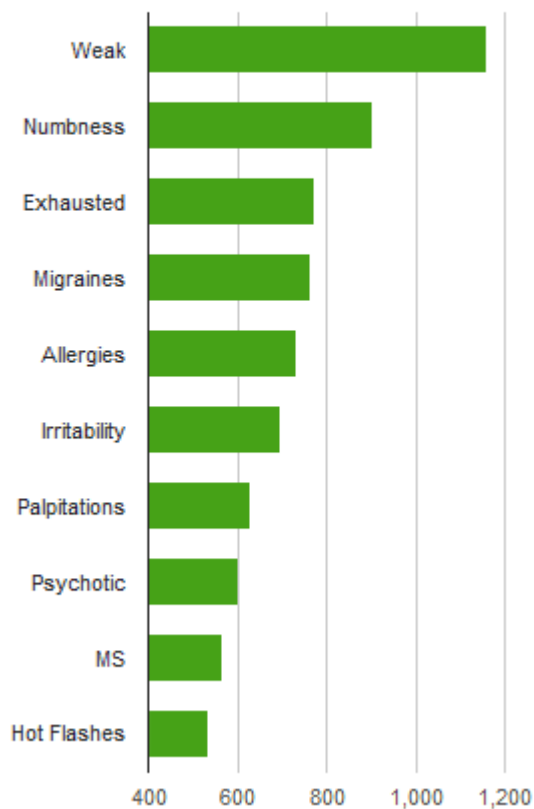
While no one here is arguing that these web resources should replace a doctor or psychiatrist, it's certainly true that both Wolfram Alpha and Healthline are empowering patients.

Here's an example: You're on Xanax, an anxiety medication that had difficult side-effects for you. You can do a Wolfram Alpha search for "[anxiety disorder treatments](#)" and note which drug class alternatives there are, choose an alternate drug (let's say "Ativan"), and do Healthline social searches for the two drugs. The two charts would quickly let you know what to expect if you switch, and both search sites would have provided quick links to additional resources on your drug options.

Most popular topics about Alprazolam (Xanax)...



Most popular topics about Lorazepam (Ativan)...



While these tools may not let patients self-diagnose or treat, those who take the time to do research here would at least know what they should be talking to their doctor *about*. Do you think you'll use search tools like these? What do you think the most important health-related tools are to add in the future? And what precautions should users take as they go through the medication research process using 21st-century tech?
