

The Relationship between the Perception of Health News and Infodemic in Adults with Chronic Diseases

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Abstract

Aim: This study examined the relationship between the perception of health news and infodemic in adults with chronic diseases.

Method: The study was a descriptive and correlational design. The population consisted of adults with chronic illnesses, and a total of 332 participants were included in the study. Data were collected using the Descriptive Information Form, the Perception of Health News Scale, and the Infodemic Scale. Numbers, percentages, means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlation analysis were used to analyze the data.

Results: Of the participants, 59.3% were female, and the mean age was 55.05±13.42 years. The mean score on the Perception of Health News Scale was 80.67±11.35, while the mean score on the Infodemic Scale was 52.86±6.43. A statistically significant relationship was found between perception of health news and infodemic scores ($p = 0.001$), indicating that as participants' perception of health news increased, their infodemic levels also increased. The perception of health news scores accounted for 2.8% of the variance in infodemic scores.

Conclusion: The results demonstrated a relationship between participants' perception of health news and the infodemic. Individuals with chronic diseases should be educated on how to assess the reliability of information sources and avoid health news from unverified origins critically.

Keywords: Health news, infodemic, chronic patients, access to health information.

Kronik Hastalığı Olan Yetişkinlerde Sağlık Haber Algısı ve İnfodemi İlişkisi

Öz

Amaç: Bu çalışmada amaç, kronik hastalığı olan yetişkinlerde sağlık haber algısı ve infodemi arasındaki ilişkiyi değerlendirmektir.

Yöntem: Çalışma tanımlayıcı ve ilişki arayıcı türdedir. Çalışmanın evrenini yetişkin kronik hastalar oluşturmaktadır. Çalışma kapsamında 332 katılımcıya ulaşılmıştır. Çalışmada veri toplama aracı olarak

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ETHICAL STATEMENT: Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Samsun University Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee (No: GOKAEK 2025/2/5).

Tanıtıcı Bilgi Formu, Sağlık Haberleri Algısı Ölçeği, Infodemi Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Çalışma verilerinin analizinde sayılar, yüzdeler, ortalama, standart sapma ve pearson korelasyon analizi kullanılmıştır.

Bulgular: Çalışmaya göre katılımcıların %59,3'ü kadın ve yaş ortalaması 55,05±13,42'dir. Katılımcıların sağlık haber algısı ölçek puanı 80,67±11,35, infodemi ölçek puanı 52,86±6,43'dür. Katılımcıların sağlık haber algısı puanı arttıkça infodemi puanı artmaktadır. Sağlık haber algısı puanı ile infodemi puanı arasında anlamlı bir ilişki bulunmuştur (p=0,001). Sağlık haber algısı puanı, infodemi puanındaki değişimin %2,8'ini açıklamaktadır.

Sonuç: Çalışma sonuçları, katılımcıların sağlık haber algısı ve infodemi arasında ilişki olduğunu göstermiştir. Kronik hastalığı olan bireyler, bilgi kaynaklarının güvenilirliğini nasıl değerlendirecekleri ve kaynağı doğrulanmamış sağlık haberlerinden nasıl kaçınacakları konusunda eğitilmelidir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Sağlık haberleri, infodemi, kronik hastalar, sağlık bilgisine erişim.

Introduction

Chronic diseases have emerged as a major global public health concern. Conditions such as cancer, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and hypertension are among the leading causes of morbidity and mortality¹. With increasing life expectancy, declining birth rates, and an aging population, the prevalence of chronic diseases and consequently, the overall disease burden has continued to rise². Chronic diseases, which account for a significant proportion of premature deaths, require effective long-term management strategies³. Although health professionals often emphasize dietary adherence, increased physical activity, and reduced tobacco use in chronic disease management, these measures alone are no longer sufficient in the digital age⁴.

Information is now disseminated at an unprecedented pace, with mass media continuously diversifying and the speed of communication increasing proportionally⁵. These developments may contribute to errors in the processing and application of health information. While health promotion initiatives increasingly emphasize personal responsibility, certain population groups may be at greater risk due to the rapid spread of unverified information⁶. For individuals with chronic diseases, the uncritical use of health-related information without proper verification constitutes a significant problem. Therefore, it is essential to consider not only how information is accessed and applied but also how it is perceived and internalized. For this reason, it is essential to understand how health-related news impacts society⁷. Traditionally, people have relied on conventional media sources to receive and stay informed about health news. However, with the rise of new media platforms, the dissemination and speed of health-related information have reached unprecedented levels. In recent years, individuals have been overwhelmed with information from social media platforms daily even when they are not actively seeking news content^{8,9}. Health news constitutes a significant portion of this information flow, serving to communicate strategies for health promotion and disease prevention to the public. As a key component of health communication, such news can significantly influence individuals' health behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes¹⁰.

Conversely, the term “infodemic” refers to the rapid spread of misinformation across digital and physical platforms during crises such as disease outbreaks, natural disasters, or attacks¹¹. The concept gained prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic when fake, distorted, or incomplete news became widespread. Research has shown that in times of crisis, the public increasingly turns to social media and news sources to follow the progression of health threats^{12,13}. For individuals living with chronic illnesses, accessing accurate and reliable information is especially critical for managing their health and incorporating necessary adjustments into their daily lives. However, both health-related news and various factors contributing to the infodemic hinder access to accurate information. The literature increasingly highlights the prevalence of misinformation and fake news concerning health^{9,14}. Therefore, this study explores a relatively under-researched topic: the relationship between the perception of health news and infodemic among adults with chronic diseases.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of health news perception and infodemic among adults with chronic diseases?
2. Is there a relationship between health news perception and infodemic among adults with chronic diseases?

Material and Methods

Research Design

This study was descriptive and correlational research design. The study was conducted at a training and research hospital in the Black Sea Region of Türkiye, between January and May 2025.

Participants

The study population consisted of individuals diagnosed with chronic diseases, while the sample included those who were admitted to the hospital for chronic diseases. The required sample size was calculated using G*Power 3.1.9.4 software. Based on an effect size of 0.50, a significance level (α) of 0.05, and a power of 95%, the minimum required sample size was determined to be 300 participants¹⁵. The study used probability sampling. The study was ultimately completed with 332 participants (n=332).

Inclusion Criteria for the Study: (1) Being 18 years of age or older, (2) Having been diagnosed with a chronic disease within the last 6 months, (3) Having the communication skills necessary to complete the study questionnaire. Individuals who did not meet these criteria were excluded from the study.

Measures

Introductory Information Form: This form was developed by researchers based on relevant literature. It includes demographic information as well as questions related to health status and media usage^{5,6}.

The Perception of Health News Scale: Developed by Çınar et al. (2018), the scale is used to assess individuals' perceptions of health-related news. It consists of 26 items grouped under five sub-dimensions: behavior change, commercial anxiety and advertisement, exploitation of health behavior, promotion of consumption, and trust in health journalism. The scale is structured as a Likert-type instrument, with scores ranging from 26 to 130. All items are framed positively but have negative meanings. Higher scores indicate a more negative perception in the relevant sub-dimension, while lower scores reflect a more positive perception. The original scale reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84¹⁶. In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was also found to be 0.84.

The Infodemic Scale: The Infodemic Scale, developed by Hendekci and Kemer (2024), assesses individuals' approaches to infodemic. The scale consists of 14 items across two sub-dimensions: awareness and literacy. It is structured as a Likert-type scale without any reverse-coded items. The total score ranges from 14 to 70, with higher scores indicating greater infodemic awareness and literacy. The original study reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87¹¹ while the reliability coefficient for this study was found to be 0.82.

Ethics Committee Approval

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Samsun University Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee (No: GOKAEK 2025/2/5). The study was conducted following the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study, and written informed consent was obtained.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using the SPSS for Windows version 22.0 software package. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, minimum and maximum values, means, and standard deviations, were calculated, and Pearson correlation, assessing relationships between variables, was used. The normality of data distribution was evaluated using "Skewness" and "Kurtosis" coefficients (± 2). Scale reliability was assessed with Cronbach's alpha, and a significance level of $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

Table 1. Normal distribution data for continuous variables

Continuous variables	n	Skewness Coefficient		Kurtosis Coefficient	
		Statistics	SD	Statistics	SD
Commercial anxiety and advertisement	332	-0.043	0.134	-0.990	0.267
Promotion of consumption	332	-0.057	0.134	-0.668	0.267
Behavior change	332	-0.198	0.134	0.094	0.267
Exploitation of health behavior	332	-0.340	0.134	-0.272	0.267
Trust in health journalism	332	-0.047	0.134	-0.572	0.267
The Perception of Health News Scale	332	0.019	0.134	-0.452	0.267
Awareness	332	-0.502	0.134	0.522	0.267
Literacy	332	-0.850	0.134	0.373	0.267
The Infodemic Scale	332	-0.477	0.134	0.157	0.267

* All data is normally distributed. SD: standart deviation

Results

According to Table 2, 59.3% of the participants were female, 33.4% held a bachelor's degree, 71.7% were married, 31.9% were retired, and 65.1% had a moderate income level. 36.7% of the participants had hypertension, and 91.9% received information about their disease from health professionals. The news did not influence 62.7% in disease management, 40.1% spent 1-2 hours daily on the internet, 40.1% watched television 3-4 hours daily, and 56.3% described their health as moderate. The mean age of the participants was 55.05±13.42 years.

Table 2. Descriptive characteristics of the participants (n=332)

	n	%	
Gender	Female	197	59.3
	Male	135	40.7
Education level	Primary school	99	29.8
	Secondary/High school	71	21.4
	Bachelor's degree	111	33.4
	Postgraduate	22	6.6
	Illiterate	29	8.7
Marital status	Married	238	71.7
	Single	94	28.3
Occupation	Retired	106	31.9
	Employed	218	65.5
	Unemployed	8	2.4
Income level	Good	62	18.7
	Moderate	216	65.1
	Bad	54	16.3
Chronic disease	Diabetes	77	23.2

	Hypertension	122	36.7		
	Respiratory diseases	9	2.7		
	Heart disease	54	16.3		
	Cancer	11	3.3		
	Rheumatologic diseases	59	17.8		
Source of information about chronic diseases	Social media	21	6.3		
	Health professionals (physicians and nurses)	305	91.9		
	Family and close friends	6	1.8		
Impact of news on disease management	Yes	124	37.3		
	No	208	62.7		
Time spent on the internet	Less than one hour	55	16.6		
	One to two hours	133	40.1		
	Three to four hours	81	24.4		
	More than five hours	19	5.7		
	Never	44	13.3		
Time spent watching television	Less than one hour	36	10.8		
	One to two hours	123	37.0		
	Three to four hours	133	40.1		
	More than five hours	40	12.0		
Health status	Good	105	31.6		
	Moderate	187	56.3		
	Bad	40	12.0		
	n	Min.	Max.	X	SD.
Age	332	19	85	55.05	13.42

According to Table 3, participants obtained the following mean scores on the Perception of Health News Scale sub-dimensions: commercial anxiety and advertisement (22.21 ± 6.12), promotion of consumption (8.75 ± 2.55), behavior change (19.52 ± 4.03), exploitation of health behavior (20.42 ± 3.27), and trust in health journalism (9.76 ± 2.06). The total score on the Perception of Health News Scale was 80.67 ± 11.35 . For the Infodemic Scale, the participants scored 34.68 ± 4.17 in the awareness sub-dimension and 18.17 ± 3.50 in the literacy sub-dimension, with a total scale score of 52.86 ± 6.43 .

Table 3. Mean scores of participants on the perception of health news scale, infodemic scale, and their subscales

Scale and Subscales	n	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD.
Commercial anxiety and advertisement	332	9.00	35.00	22.21	6.12
Promotion of consumption	332	3.00	15.00	8.75	2.55
Behavior change	332	8.00	29.00	19.52	4.03
Exploitation of health behavior	332	12.00	28.00	20.42	3.27
Trust in health journalism	332	5.00	15.00	9.76	2.06
The Perception of Health News Scale	332	51.00	111.00	80.67	11.35
Awareness	332	21.00	45.00	34.68	4.17
Literacy	332	8.00	25.00	18.17	3.50
The Infodemic Scale	332	31.00	67.00	52.86	6.43

According to Table 4, a statistically significant and positive correlation was found between the commercial anxiety and advertisement sub-dimension and the awareness, literacy, and total infodemic scores ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that as commercial anxiety and advertisement scores increase, so do awareness, literacy, and overall infodemic scores. A statistically significant negative correlation was found between the promotion of consumption score and the awareness score ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that a higher promotion of consumption score is associated with lower awareness. There was also a statistically significant negative relationship between the behavioral change score and both the awareness sub-dimension and the total infodemic score ($p < 0.05$). In other words, as behavioral change scores increase, awareness and overall infodemic scores tend to decrease. In contrast, the exploitation of health behavior score showed a statistically significant positive correlation with both the awareness sub-dimension and the total infodemic score ($p < 0.05$), indicating that as scores related to exploitation of health behavior rise, so do awareness and total infodemic levels. A statistically significant positive correlation was also found between the trust in health journalism score and all three variables: awareness, literacy, and the total infodemic score ($p < 0.05$). This suggests that stronger trust in health journalism is associated with higher levels of infodemic awareness and literacy. A statistically significant positive relationship was observed between the total score of the Perception of Health News Scale and the awareness, literacy, and total infodemic scores ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the high Perception of Health News Scale score is associated with greater infodemic-related awareness and skills.

Table 4. Correlation between perception of health news and infodemic scale scores

		Awareness	Literacy	Infodemic Scale
Commercial anxiety and advertisement	r	0.225	0.233	0.273
	p	0.000	0.000	0.000
	n	332	332	332
Promotion of consumption	r	-0.119	0.075	-0.036
	p	0.031	0.173	0.513
	n	332	332	332
Behavior change	r	-0.162	-0.090	-0.154
	p	0.003	0.102	0.005
	n	332	332	332
Exploitation of health behavior	r	0.221	0.064	0.178
	p	0.000	0.243	0.001
	n	332	332	332
Trust in health journalism	r	0.236	0.115	0.216
	p	0.000	0.037	0.000
	n	332	332	332
The Perception of Health News Scale	r	0.144	0.150	0.175
	p	0.009	0.006	0.001
	n	332	332	332

According to Table 5, a regression analysis was conducted to examine the effect of the Perception of Health News Scale on the Infodemic Score. The analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship between the two variables ($R=0.175$, $R^2_{\text{adjusted}}=0.028$, $F(1,330)=10.416$; $p=0.001$). The Perception of Health News Scale accounted for approximately 2.8% of the variance in the Infodemic Score. A one-unit increase in the Health News Perception Score predicted a 0.099-unit increase in the Infodemic Score.

Table 5. Regression analysis showing the effect of perception of health news on infodemic

	Beta	Standard Error	Standard Beta	t	p	%95 Confidence interval	
Constant coefficient	44.869	2.500		17.949	0.000	39.951	49.787
The Perception of Health News Scale	0.099	0.031	0.175	3.227	0.001	0.039	0.159

According to Table 6, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the effect of subscale scores from the Health News Perception Scale on Infodemic Scores.

The results revealed that the established model is statistically significant ($F(5,326)=9.45$, $p < .001$), explaining 11.3% of the variance in infodemic scores ($R^2=.113$). The results of the analysis show that the commercial concern and advertising subdimension positively and significantly predicts the infodemic score ($B=0.24$, $SE=0.06$, $\beta=.23$, $t=3.79$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.12, 0.36]). Conversely, the behavior change subdimension was found to negatively and significantly affect the infodemic score ($B=-0.38$, $SE=0.10$, $\beta=-.24$, $t=-3.83$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.58, -0.19]).

Table 6. Regression analysis showing the effect of health news perception scale subscale scores on infodemic score

	Beta	Standard Error	Standard Beta	t	p	%95 Confidence Interval	
Constant coefficient	47.666	2.697	-	17.673	0.000	42.360	52.972
Commercial anxiety and advertisement	0.240	0.063	0.229	3.792	0.000	0.115	0.364
Promotion of consumption	0.254	0.158	0.101	1.609	0.109	-0.057	0.565
Behavior change	-0.384	0.100	-0.241	-3.831	0.000	-0.581	-0.187
Exploitation of health behavior	0.104	0.125	0.053	0.833	0.406	-0.142	0.350
Trust in health journalism	0.308	0.197	0.099	1.569	0.118	-0.078	0.695

$R^2 = 0.113$ $F = 9.454$ $p = 0.000$

Discussion

The results revealed that participants' perceptions of health news were above the moderate level. Given that higher scores on the Perception of Health News Scale indicate more negative evaluations of health news. It can be concluded that participants generally hold negative views toward health-related media content. Health news disseminated through media plays a crucial role in shaping how individuals with chronic conditions manage their illnesses. Access to accurate, reliable health information significantly influences disease progression, treatment adherence, and overall quality of life. Furthermore, accurate information can help reduce the psychological burden associated with chronic diseases by promoting informed decision-making and fostering a sense of control⁷. Conversely, the negative perception of health news observed in this study may hinder patients' ability to effectively manage their health, potentially leading to poorer outcomes.

The study also found that participants' infodemic scores were relatively high. This suggests that participants are actively aware of the risks of misinformation and demonstrate a cautious approach to health information during crises seeking reliable sources, adhering to expert advice, and avoiding the spread of unverified content. In this context, high infodemic awareness and literacy may serve as a protective factor, helping

individuals to resort to complex health information environments. Continuous exposure to large amounts of misinformation can contribute to high levels of anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns. This effect was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when individuals with chronic illnesses and older adults reported symptoms of anxiety and depression due to the persistent influx of pandemic-related news¹⁸. For those already coping with chronic health conditions, the spread of inaccurate or misleading information can exacerbate psychological distress, leading to increased stress, anxiety, and concern.

In the present study, patients scored highly on the “commercial anxiety and advertisement” subscale of the Perception of Health News Scale, suggesting that participants perceive health news as being primarily driven by commercial interests and advertising motives. Moreover, a positive correlation was identified between scores on this sub-dimension and the awareness and literacy components of the Infodemic Scale. This indicates that patients who are more informed and aware of the infodemic also tend to believe that health news is heavily influenced by commercial objectives. Previous research supports this perspective, indicating that while health service advertisements may offer some educational or superficially empowering messages, they are fundamentally aimed at promoting sales. These advertisements often have a high potential to mislead consumers¹⁹. Overall, both the current findings and the current literature highlight the complex interplay between media-driven health communication and the commercialization of health-related products and services.

According to the results of this study, patients scored highly on the “promotion of consumption” sub-dimension of the Perception of Health News Scale, indicating that health news often influences or encourages individuals to purchase health-related products or services. Additionally, a negative correlation was found between the “promotion of consumption” sub-dimension and the awareness component of the Infodemic Scale. As patients are more influenced by health news to engage in consumption, their awareness of infodemic-related issues tends to decrease. The media’s tendency to emphasize individual preferences in health management may contribute to the neglect of broader personal and societal determinants of health²⁰. Research has also shown that self-efficacy and health literacy play a critical role in chronic patients’ engagement in managing their health conditions⁷. Furthermore, an analysis of health news content found that such news often promotes consumption by idealizing the lifestyles of individuals with higher income levels²¹. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that promoting awareness of accurate health information in the media may enable individuals to make more conscious decisions regarding health-related products and services. These two results obtained presented consecutively, show us that there is a positive relationship with “commercial anxiety and advertisement” and a negative relationship with “promotion of consumption”; this situation shows that the same person may both recognize the commercial purposes of the news and be open to being directed towards consumption.

The study also revealed that patients scored highly on the “behavior change” sub-dimension, indicating that they may be inclined to alter their behaviors in response to health news²². However, a negative correlation was found between the behavior change dimension and both infodemic and awareness scores. This suggests that lower awareness of infodemic content may lead to undesirable behavioral changes driven by misleading or inaccurate health news. Particularly during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals with chronic illnesses may become more susceptible to the influence of health-related news and exhibit increased sensitivity to its content. Previous studies have demonstrated that infodemic can cause confusion in individuals’ health behaviors and impair their decision-making processes^{23,24}. It is therefore concerning when individuals with chronic conditions, especially those with limited awareness of the credibility of health news, modify their behaviors based on potentially unreliable information.

The results of this study demonstrated that patients scored highly on the “exploitation of health behavior” sub-dimension of the Perception of Health News Scale, suggesting that participants felt influenced by health news in a way that led them to perceive their health behaviors as being manipulated or exploited. A positive correlation was identified between the exploitation of health behavior sub-dimension and both infodemic and awareness scores. This implies that individuals who are more aware of infodemic content are also more likely to recognize the potential for health news to exploit health behaviors. Exposure to news about the supposed effectiveness of new treatments may prompt patients to pursue interventions that are unnecessary or inappropriate for their condition²⁵. Moreover, health information disseminated through the media has been reported to increase anxiety levels and lead individuals to adopt unnecessary and sometimes harmful practices²⁶. After all these considerations, these findings and the limited available literature suggest that patients who are actively seeking accurate information for managing their chronic conditions may still be vulnerable to making impulsive or misguided health-related decisions.

The patients' health news perception “trust in health journalism” sub-dimension score was at a moderate level in this study. The awareness and literacy levels of patients with a moderate level of belief in health news were high. Today, misinformation about health via the internet has reached undesirable levels. As a result of medical misinformation, delays in receiving health services, drug incompatibility, vaccine hesitancy, increased disease burden, and increased hospitalizations and deaths may occur²⁷. Therefore, access to accurate health-related information and belief in information are important for disease management. Because individuals with chronic diseases are expected to understand and follow health guidelines. Systems that control the accuracy of health news in the media should be developed to prevent individuals from being affected by false and negative health news.

This study found a positive correlation between scores on the Perception of Health News Scale and scores on the Infodemic Scale. Individuals who hold negative perceptions of health news tend to exhibit higher levels of awareness and literacy regarding infodemic information. In other words, patients who are more critical of health news are also more

conscious of misinformation and better equipped to navigate it. However, previous research has shown that negative attitudes toward health news can sometimes lead individuals to place greater trust in inaccurate or misleading information, which may result in harmful health behaviors and reduced adherence to public health recommendations^{28,29}. These contradictory findings underscore the complexity of the relationship between media perception and health literacy. Given the media's powerful role in shaping health behaviors, it is important to recognize that health news can contribute to misperceptions³⁰. Therefore, enhancing individuals' health, media, and digital literacy is essential to reduce the spread of health-related misinformation during times of crisis and to reduce its potential negative impact on public health.

In summary, the health news perception score in this study explains 2.8% of the variation in the infodemic score. Therefore, it can be argued that negative perceptions of health news explain only a very limited part of infodemic literacy and awareness. Although the related literature is quite limited, future studies should also assess individual characteristics, digital literacy, media literacy, and critical thinking skills, which may have much stronger effects on influencing infodemic literacy and awareness.

Conclusion

This study revealed a significant relationship between participants' perception of health news and infodemic; as the perception of health news scores increased, so did the infodemic scores. These findings highlight the importance of accurate information-seeking behavior and underscore the need for tailored approaches to support specific vulnerable groups.

Based on the study results, it is evident that at-risk populations, especially chronic patients, require greater awareness regarding the interpretation of health news and the evaluation of information credibility. To address this need, it is recommended to develop engaging and reliable social platforms in collaboration with healthcare professionals and informatics experts. Such platforms could facilitate accurate information exchange and enhance public understanding during health crises. Targeted health communication strategies should be developed to mitigate the negative impact of infodemic on individuals with chronic conditions, particularly during times of crisis. These strategies should be included in national health and communication policies. Health professionals' (doctors and nurses) skills and experience should be utilized in these policy development processes.

Limitations

The main limitation of this study is that it is based on reports from chronic patients who consulted a local health center. Therefore, including chronic patients from different centers to ensure diversity in similar studies would increase the level of evidence. Additionally, the sampling method can also be considered one of the significant limitations.

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