Arizona Center for Rural Health
State Office of Rural Health Webinar Series

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Webinar notes:

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Identifying and Addressing Health Misinformation

Presenter:
Loren Halili, MPH
We respectfully acknowledge the University of Arizona is on the land and territories of Indigenous peoples. Today, Arizona is home to 22 federally recognized tribes, with Tucson being home to the O’odham and the Yaqui. Committed to diversity and inclusion, the University strives to build sustainable relationships with sovereign Native Nations and Indigenous communities through education offerings, partnerships, and community service.

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Identifying and Addressing Health Misinformation

Loren Halili, MPH
August 18th, 2022
Learning Objectives

- Understand what misinformation is and how it is spread
- Be able to identify the different types of misinformation
- Explain the role of healthcare and public health professionals in dispelling misinformation
What is Misinformation?

Misinformation
Information that is false, inaccurate, or misleading according to the best available evidence at the time
What is Misinformation?

"Misinformation can sometimes be spread intentionally to serve a malicious purpose, such as for financial gain or political advantage. This is usually called “disinformation.”

Many people who share misinformation aren’t trying to misinform. They may be raising a concern, making sense of conflicting information, or seeking answers to honest questions."
How is Misinformation Spread?
Health misinformation is often posted on the internet or shared via text messages or emails.
Health misinformation can also appear in

- Speeches
- Pamphlets or posters
- News outlets
- Advertisements
How is Misinformation Spread?

Misinformation can be shared by ANYONE!
How is Misinformation Spread?

Many people who share misinformation may be

- Raising a concern
- Making sense of conflicting information
- Seeking answers to honest questions
What types of misinformation exist?

7 Common Types of Misinformation
What types of misinformation exist?

**Memes** (fun, colorful images or graphics) that were created as a joke, but people started re-sharing thinking it was true.
What types of misinformation exist?

- Old images that recirculate as if they are very recent.
- Memes (fun, colorful images or graphics) that were created as a joke, but people started re-sharing thinking it was true.
- Websites that look professional (often designed to look like news sites) but the stories are all false or misleading. They have sensational headlines designed to make us click on them.
What types of misinformation exist?

Quotation from The Cleveland Clinic:

“getting the COVID-19 vaccine can cause infertility.”

Quotations where the beginning or the end have been deleted to change the meaning. The person did say that, but without the full context it’s not a fair representation of what they said.
What types of misinformation exist?

Old images that recirculate as if they are very recent.
What types of misinformation exist?

Misleading graphs or diagrams that look official but don’t tell the whole story.

Look at the scale of the y-axis...
What types of misinformation exist?

Cherry-picked statistics. Too often we see people choosing the number that supports what they want to argue, but without sufficient data, they haven’t provided all the context.

“Four out of five dentists surveyed recommended sugarless gum for their patients who chew gum”
- How and with whom was the survey conducted?
- n = ?
- What about the fifth dentist?
What types of misinformation exist?

**Videos** that have been edited to change the meaning.
Why Is It So Tempting to Share Health Misinformation?

1. We like to feel that we have new information that others don’t know.

   The doctors are hiding important information about the virus! Listen to what this one nurse has to say about it...

2. We want to protect the people we care about. Often when people are asked about their online sharing habits, they will say things like:

   I admit it. Sometimes I share things I see without checking first, but honestly, I feel that it's better to be safe than sorry.
3. We may be seeking explanations or wanting to share information that helps us make sense of events.

Hey there Parker, Claire, Hanna, Kyla, Jacob, Ann! How’s everyone?

Have you seen this video? I don’t know who made it, but everything seems to make sense now!

4. We want to feel connected to others.
What is the cost of spreading misinformation?
What is the cost of spreading misinformation?

Misinformation can influence someone’s behavior, response, and decision making, which then...

• Erodes trust in science and the government
• Burdens the healthcare system
• Increases morbidity and mortality
• Undermine public health efforts
Arizona Department of Health Services has a hub of health information available to the public.

“Our team is committed to providing up-to-date information and resources to keep Arizonans safe, including extensive data about COVID-19 in our state.”
Local Resources for Trustworthy Information

The ADHS website provides COVID-19 resources, like:
- Vaccine locations
- Testing locations
- Dashboards
- Guidance
- Communication
- Key facts
- Data

Other trusted local sources of information:
- Local health department or hospital
- Covidlatino.org
- CEAL
SIFT Your Resources!

5 W Questions:
• Who is the author?
• What is the purpose of the content?
• Where is the content from?
• Why does the source exist?
• How does the source compare to others?

Misinformation: Special Considerations in Rural Communities

Rural areas have different beliefs regarding health, due to...

- Poverty
- Lack of access to healthcare
- Low literacy levels
- Lower availability of broadband internet access

Misinformation: Special Considerations in Rural Communities

Previous studies have shown that rural communities have...

- Lower overall vaccination rates
  - 58% rural vs. 75% urban vaccine uptake
- Relationship with the government
  - 68% of rural individuals say government restrictions aimed at limiting the spread of COVID-19 is holding back economic growth
- Increase hesitancy in getting the vaccine
  - 38% of individuals will ‘wait and see’ how the vaccine affects others before getting it themselves
Our Role as Healthcare and Public Health Professionals
Our Role as Healthcare and Public Health Professionals

Addressing misinformation requires more than just attempting to discredit misconceptions

Health professionals must:

• Proactively engage with patients and the public on health misinformation

• Partner with community groups and other local organizations

• Use technology and media platforms to share accurate health information with the public

Our Role as Healthcare and Public Health Professionals

1. Listen

- **Listen** to their fears and beliefs
- Focus on the wider issue and how they feel
- Remember that ‘fact-check’ can often shut down a conversation
Our Role as Healthcare and Public Health Professionals

2. Empathize

- Emphasize the fact that you understand why people find it difficult to trust
- Ask questions to understand
- Talk about times where you have fallen for misinformation
3. Point to Credible Sources

- Underscore that finding accurate information can be hard
- Emphasize the need to find credible sources
- Remind them that an expert on one topic might not be the best in another topic
Our Role as Healthcare and Public Health Professionals

4. Don’t Publicly Shame

- Try to have conversations one-on-one
- Having conversations in the comments under a post has the potential to backfire
- Be gentle in your replies; be empathetic
Our Role as Healthcare and Public Health Professionals

5. Use Inclusive Language

- Use language that makes it clear that you see yourself being impacted
- Show how you sometimes struggle
Our Role as Healthcare and Public Health Professionals: Agencies, Institutions, and Organizations

- Invest in long-term efforts to build resilience against misinformation
  - Media, science, digital, data, and health literacy programs
  - Trainings on how to address misinformation to account for patient’s diverse needs, concerns, backgrounds, and experiences
- Convene federal, state, local, territorial, tribal, private, nonprofit, and research partners

All of us are vulnerable, and all of us can help!

Access the ToolKit from U.S. Surgeon General

American Medical Association Misinformation Resources
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Thank you!