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# Social media networks must crack down on medical misinformation

By Sara Berg, MS, News Editor 

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The COVID-19 pandemic is the first public health emergency in which social media has been used widely. While more than two-thirds of Americans get their news from at least one social media outlet, that information does not go through the same vetting process as is done by professional news organizations. This allows medical misinformation to be conveyed as real news, according to a resolution presented at the June 2021 AMA Special Meeting.

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As discussed during the meeting, there are numerous instances of dangerous medical misinformation, including debunked links between the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine and autism, studies that show more than half of health articles posted online are deemed “problematic,” and an analysis of YouTube videos about COVID-19 that showed 25% of topic videos contain misleading information. Physicians at the meeting noted that they are spending an increasing amount of time addressing misinformation with patients.

“With more and more patients relying on social media for information—including medical information—dangerous misinformation about vaccines and public health issues poses a serious risk to patient health,” said AMA Trustee Sandra Adamson Fryhofer, MD. “We strongly urge social media companies to further bolster their content moderation of medical and public health information, including enhanced content monitoring, augmentation of recommendation engines focused on false information, and stronger integration of verified health information.”

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To promote public health and address misinformation on social media, the House of Delegates directed the AMA to:

Encourage social media companies and organizations to further strengthen their content-moderation policies related to medical and public health misinformation, including enhanced content monitoring, augmentation of recommendation engines focused on false information, and stronger integration of verified health information. Encourage social media companies and organizations to recognize the spread of medical and public health misinformation over dissemination networks and collaborate with relevant stakeholders to address this problem as appropriate, including but not limited to altering underlying network dynamics or redesigning platform algorithms.

Support the dissemination of accurate medical and public health information by public health organizations and health-policy experts. Work with public health agencies in an effort to establish relationships with journalists and news agencies to enhance the public reach in disseminating accurate medical and public health information.

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Delegates also modified existing policy that calls on the AMA to support COVID-19 vaccination and information programs. According to the amended policy, the AMA will educate:

The public about up-to-date, evidence-based information regarding COVID-19 and associated infections, as well as the safety and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines, by countering misinformation and building public confidence.

Physicians and other health care professionals on means to disseminate accurate information and methods to combat medical misinformation online.

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