

Best Practice Paper Tackling Health Misinformation



**Faculty of
Pharmaceutical Medicine**

of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the United Kingdom



**FACULTY OF
PUBLIC HEALTH**

Best Practice Paper – Tackling Health Misinformation

Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine and the Faculty of Public Health

Introduction

Tackling health misinformation is essential to building public trust in health and medicine. The erosion of trust has detrimentally impacted the health of so many, whether that be encouraging poor vaccine uptake, the advent of unsafe medical treatments, or fear of taking appropriate treatments at all.

While governments, regulators and technology companies all have important roles to play, healthcare professionals are not powerless. Healthcare professionals have a role to play in educating the public and tackling health misinformation.

This Best Practice paper from the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine and the Faculty of Public Health aims to give healthcare professionals several practical actions to reduce the impact of misinformation and help others make informed health decisions.

What is health misinformation?

Health misinformation can be categorised into five themes:

- misinformation is where false information is shared without intent to mislead
- disinformation is where false information is shared with the intent to deceive
- malinformation is where truthful information is twisted (or taken out of context) to maliciously mislead
- missing information is where there are information gaps that leave people without what they need to understand their issue.
- Infodemic is where too much information is provided (including false or misleading information), which obscures and buries the key true information that is needed, such as, during a disease outbreak.

For the purpose of this Best Practice paper, we will be using the general term 'misinformation', unless stated otherwise.

Why is tackling health misinformation important?

Misinformation is a major public-health risk, the World Health Organisation identifies health misinformation and disinformation as a major threat to global healthⁱ, the European Commission sees health information manipulation as a risk to personal

and societal health and global progressⁱⁱ, and the World Economic Forum ranks misinformation and disinformation as the number two short- to medium-term global riskⁱⁱⁱ. What we are seeing on the ground is dire, in the UK, half of adults struggle to access trusted health information, and 1 in 10 adults report being affected by misinformation, rising to 1 in 5 among ethnic minorities^{iv}, this proliferation, has real world effects.

Health misinformation can erode public trust and influence decisions about medicines, vaccines, treatments and healthy behaviours, sometimes leading to significant harm.

Practical actions healthcare professionals can take to tackle misinformation

Whilst tackling misinformation may seem daunting, there are real practical actions that healthcare professionals (HCPs) can embed into their practice.

1. Building Trust Before Misinformation Spreads

Building trust is a fundamental component of preventing the spread and impact of misinformation.

- HCPs should communicate openly, transparently, and consistently with their patients to establish credibility and confidence.
- HCPs should ensure that patients can easily find and understand evidence-based information.

2. Detecting Misinformation Early

Early identification of misinformation is critical to limiting its reach and potential harm.

- HCPs should report and flag to the relevant host, misinformation that they come across.

3. Using Pre-bunking Approaches

Sharing information on topics that are particularly vulnerable to misinformation can further strengthen resilience and reduce the likelihood that false narratives will gain traction.

- HCPs should share information where they feel confident to do so.

Information should be presented in clear, concise, and accessible language that is appropriate for the target audience. Information should be tailored to accommodate different literacy levels, cultural contexts, and language requirements.

4. Debunking Misinformation Effectively

When misinformation has already spread, corrective communication should follow evidence-based principles. Effective debunking begins by clearly stating the information.

- HCPs should identify the misleading claim as false, followed by a clear explanation of why the information is incorrect and what evidence contradicts it. Communications should conclude by reinforcing the correct information to ensure that accurate messages remain prominent.

If engaging with, and challenging, misinformation on social media, it should be done in a respectful manner. Misinformation is often linked to social identity, trust and community dynamics rather than simply a lack of knowledge. So when discussing health topics:

- HCPs should listen respectfully to concerns, avoid ridicule or confrontation, provide clear evidence without becoming argumentative.

People are generally more receptive when they feel respected and understood. Productive conversations are often more effective than attempts to "win" debates.

5. Using artificial intelligence responsibly

Artificial intelligence has the potential to support efforts to combat health misinformation at scale.

- HCPs can use AI tools to generate targeted pre-bunking messages, simplify complex health guidance, and translate verified information into multiple languages.

However, where AI is used, attention should be given to ensure it is being used ethically and is the right AI tool for that particular use and context.

Conclusion

Tackling health misinformation is a shared responsibility, but healthcare professionals have a particularly important role in helping people navigate complex and often confusing information. By building trust, identifying misinformation early, using pre-bunking and debunking approaches, and applying tools such as artificial intelligence responsibly, HCPs can support informed decision-making and reduce harm. Small, consistent actions in everyday practice can help strengthen public confidence in health information and protect the wellbeing of individuals and communities.

August 2026

ⁱ WHO Review 2024, <https://www.who.int/news-room/spotlight/who-looks-back-at-2024>

ⁱⁱ Health information manipulation https://health.ec.europa.eu/eu-health-policy/health-information-manipulation_en

ⁱⁱⁱ WEF global risk report (2026) https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Risks_Report_2026.pdf

^{iv} Knowledge is Power <https://pifonline.org.uk/resources/knowledge-is-power/>