

Health Misinformation Typology

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Letter to the editor

In the health communication, information can be considered as an independent unit that has the possibility of getting sick and out of its normal health. From this view, health misinformation can be considered as a type of information disorders (1). Misinformation has always been an important part of human communication; however, today, the spread of general misinformation and especially health misinformation by the traditional and modern media has caused serious concern among citizens, scientists, and government officials. Some concerns are based on the assumption that misinformation has the potential to influence the way individuals think, feel and behave about issues contaminated by misinformation, and endanger public health (2).

Swire-Thompson and Lazer define the misinformation as "information contrary to the epistemological consensus of the scientific community about a phenomenon" (3). Therefore, health misinformation is a special type of misinformation that contains one or more health-related claims inconsistent with the scientific consensus of health professionals (4). A suitable example is the use of the Internet and social media to release the misinformation about the vaccine and the spread of anti-vaccine emotions in recent years, which has brought harm to the individual and society (5).

Considering the importance of understanding health misinformation prevent it, it seems necessary to identify the types of health misinformation and examples of each type and the extent of possible damage so that appropriate solutions can be found to deal with it.

Given according to the continuous progresses and changes of science, the information published in the health sciences is in a spectrum in terms of accuracy and accuracy, it is possible to divide the types of common health misinformation into three categories based on the level of its accuracy and precision: 1) Misinformation type 1 (Dissemination of totally incorrect health information): In this case, the sender (individual or media) disseminates health information that is completely medically incorrect and causes an information disorder that can harm the health of the individual and society. 2) Misinformation Type 2 (Propagation of health pseudoscience): In this case, the sender (individual or media) presents irrelevant health information and a person may express correct presuppositions or correct propositions incorrectly or draw incorrect conclusions from them. This case will cause an information disorder and possible damage to the health of the individual and the society. 3) Misinformation Type 3 (Conditional recommendations): In this case, the sender (individual or media) advises and offers health information, which after being reviewed and evaluated by clinical experts or health scientists, their validity and strength are still unknown and is not but it is correctly used in special conditions or situations of each patient. This case, like the previous two cases, has caused information disorders, and although the purpose of these advices is not to harm others, it can unintentionally cause damage to the health of the individual and the society through circulating the relatively correct but marginal health information (6). Figure1 shows this categorizing with an example.

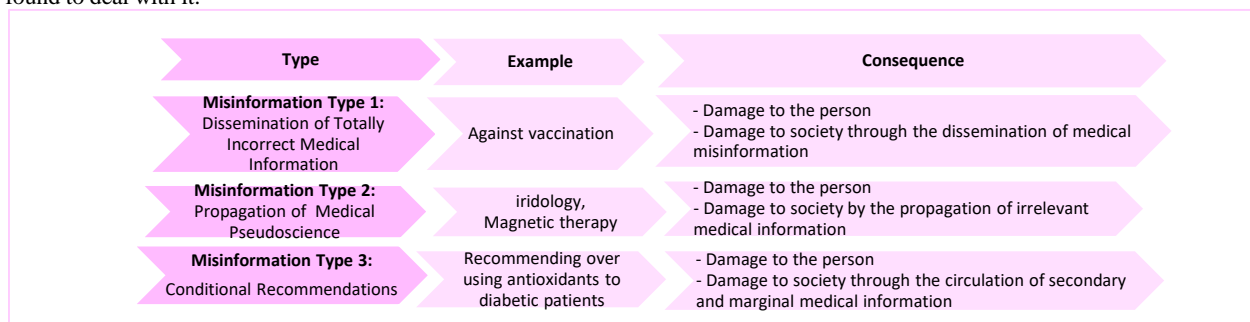


Figure 1: Health Misinformation Typology

In the end, it can be said that to prevent the circulation of health misinformation in the society, it seems necessary for the health policy makers to make a plan for educating the senders and receivers and the operators of health communication channels. The suggested issues of this educational plan can be include some training workshops about validating the health information

through comparison with the dependable books and journals or checking with a professional, evaluation of the authors and considering the differences in the specific health conditions of each person. Besides, having the organizational supervision on the production, dissemination and circulation of health information in the society can be useful.

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