

The wanton spread of medical misinformation



Cardiovascular disease is the no. 1 killer of both men and women worldwide. Robust scientific advances have fostered significant improvements that benefit individuals and society. These successes derive from an armamentarium of powerful tools — medicines and devices — and awareness of lifestyle-related hazards, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and smoking.

However, use of this prodigious tool chest remains suboptimal and one significant factor behind this is medical misinformation hyped through the internet, television, chat rooms, and social media. In many instances, celebrities, activists, and politicians convey false information. Recent evidence suggests that misinformation travels faster through social networks than truth.

For example, the majority of cardiologists have had conversations with patients urging them to take statins, powerful cholesterol-lowering drugs with robust mortality benefit. Part of the reason these oftentimes 'no brainer' recommendations are rejected derives from widely disseminated incorrect information which vastly over-states the risks of these drugs. Thus, many patients who would benefit from statin use do not take them.

The editors-in-chief of the major cardiovascular scientific journals around the globe, in a joint statement, sound the alarm that human lives are at stake. They note that celebrities, actors, activists, and politicians with no specific knowledge or training use their fame to promote a message that causes serious harm. "It is easy to find a rogue voice but inappropriate to suggest that voice carries the same weight as that emerging from mainstream science," according to the journal editors.

As editors, they say it is their duty to evaluate the validity of the science presented to them for possible publication, "and we work hard to fulfil this heady responsibility." These editors, in fact, reach out to thought-leading experts to evaluate the veracity of each report they receive for publication. In their joint statement, the journal editors challenge social media to do the same, to leverage the ready availability of science-conversant expertise before disseminating content that may not be reliable.

"Without exaggeration, significant harm, to society and individuals, derives from the wanton spread of medical misinformation. It is high time that this stop, and we lay at the feet of the purveyors of internet and social media content the responsibility to fix this," according to the editors' joint statement.

Source: [European Heart Journal](#)

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