

Collaboration needed to end spread of public health misinformation

NOV 17, 2021

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There is ongoing concern over the harmful effects of disinformation being disseminated by a small number of health professionals. Such falsehoods have been directly linked to vaccine hesitancy and have also contributed to the disregard for proper prevention practices such as mask-wearing, physical distancing and handwashing, says a resolution from the AMA Young Physicians Section (AMA-YPS) presented at the Special Meeting.

“Physicians are among the most trusted source of information and advice for patients and the public at large, which is why it’s so dangerous when a physician or other health care professional spreads disinformation,” said AMA Trustee Jesse M. Ehrenfeld, MD, MPH.

“While disinformation has run rampant during the COVID-19 pandemic, we know unscientific claims are being made about other health conditions and other public health initiatives are being undermined,” Dr. Ehrenfeld added. “We are committed to doing everything we can to stop the spread of disinformation and providing accurate, evidence-based information—the lives of our patients and the public depend on it.”

Learn with the AMA about six ways doctors can use their voices to help science get heard.

Defying evidence not an option

When health professionals push untested treatments and cures for COVID-19, they are placing the public at risk for further harm. When health professionals make public statements that are deliberately contrary to prevailing evidence, it can even constitute unprofessional conduct, says another resolution presented by the AMA-YPS.

To help tackle these challenges, the House of Delegates directed the AMA to collaborate with relevant health professional societies and other stakeholders:

- On efforts to combat public health disinformation disseminated by health professionals in all forms of media.
- Address disinformation that undermines public health initiatives.

Also, the AMA will “study disinformation disseminated by health professional and its impact on public health and present a comprehensive strategy to address this issue with a report back at the next meeting of the House of Delegates.”

Read about the other highlights from the November 2021 AMA Special Meeting.