

Medics have a part to play in stopping health rumours spreading on the web

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Medical professionals are reluctant to engage in correcting health rumours circulating on the internet, a study by the University of York

has revealed.

The authors of the report say [medical professionals](#) need to actively take part in correcting online health rumours.

As part of the study, 60 health professionals, including doctors, nurses and medical students, were exposed to eight cancer-related rumours.

The academics looked at two types of medical rumour: wish rumours and dread rumours. Wish rumours project hope while dread rumours are those that project fear.

Social media

The academics wanted to see how medical professionals reacted to these rumours on social media. Would they react in the same way as a lay person or would they be different?

Intention to trust and [intention](#) to share were measured using a questionnaire.

The study revealed that medical professionals are more likely to engage with dread rumours than compared with wish rumours, but largely remained passive.

The presence of rumour denials lowered intention to trust, but not intention to share.

Dr. Snehasish Banerjee, who carried out the study at the York Management School, University of York, said: "It seems medical professionals are affected by dread rumours in the same way as lay people – even though they have medical knowledge.

"The results reveal that medical professionals don't trust the rumours and don't share the denials, they just remain nonchalant.

"It seems they don't see themselves as valuable contributors on social [media](#), even though they are knowledgeable contributors in the off-line world.

"They don't appreciate their professional role in debunking health rumours circulating on the internet."

The authors of the study say healthcare website administrators should be incentivised in correcting health-related online misinformation.

Denials

"Merely bombarding [health](#) rumours with rumour denials may not always be effective to stop the internet from becoming a rumour mill," Dr. Banerjee added.

"Primarily, the medical professionals see [social media](#) for leisure, they want to disassociate that leisure activity from their professional life.

"We are arguing they don't have to seek out all the fake news to debunk, but if they come across a rumour they should play their part."

More information: Alton Y.K. Chua et al. Intentions to trust and share online health rumors: An experiment with medical professionals, *Computers in Human Behavior* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.chb.2018.05.021](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.05.021)

Provided by University of York

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