How nurses can help reduce health misinformation

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On July 15, 2021, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an urgent plea for all Americans to take part in slowing a serious threat to public health. He wasn't talking about the COVID-19 pandemic, but rather the harmful

effects on personal and public health caused by the infodemic—the creation and spread of an excessive amount of unreliable and false health information.

An article from the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing (Penn Nursing) just published online in the *American Nurse Journal* explains how misinformation was accelerated during the pandemic and how social media platforms (SMPs) amplified the problem. The article "Preventing the Spread of Misinformation—A Role for All Nurses" shares the critical role nurses play in reducing health misinformation harm and helping patients, families, and communities access credible, trusted sources. It also further elaborates on how nurses can identify credible information when interacting with SMPs.

"Nurses and consumers must develop skills to evaluate information critically," says article lead author Antonia M. Villarruel, Ph.D., RN, FAAN, Professor and Margaret Bond Simon Dean of Nursing at Penn Nursing. "A study examining the impact of trust in science found that people with high trust in science were more likely to believe and disseminate misinformation about COVID-19 and genetically modified organisms in the presence of a scientific reference compared to false claims without scientific references. These findings underscore the importance of critically evaluating information, even from trusted sources."

"Misinformation has accelerated during the pandemic, resulting in what the World Health Organization (WHO) calls an infodemic. The effects include confusion and support for behaviors that can harm health, lead to mistrust in science, and ultimately undermine the public health response to the pandemic," says Richard James, MSLIS, nursing liaison librarian at Penn Nursing and coauthor of the article.

The article is based on a perspectives paper Villarruel coauthored for the

National Academy of Medicine titled "Identifying Credible Sources of Health Information in Social Media: Principles and Attributes."

 More information: The article is available as a PDF at [www.myamericannurse.com/wp-con … sinformation-117.pdf](http://www.myamericannurse.com/wp-con)

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