

Twitter health amplifiers combat COVID-19 misinformation

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At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, when false information about the virus began to spread on Twitter, physicians and scientists from Northwestern Medicine and other institutions banded together to combat the deadly misinformation and disinformation and support one another when they ultimately were attacked online for doing so.

They formed a new type of professional organization—the health professional amplifier—to tweet accurate health and safety information about COVID-19 and amplify one another "to combat misinformation and drown out some of the noise," said Dr. Regina Royan, first author of a new *Northwestern Medicine* paper explaining the genesis of these groups and a member of the Illinois-based health professional amplifier, IMPACT (Illinois Medical Professional Action Collaborative Team), which uses the verified Twitter handle @IMPACT4HC.

In the paper, published July 22 in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, Royan and fellow medical professionals explain how successful this group has been and why it is an effective tool to disseminate accurate medical information and combat disinformation while minimizing the harm related to personal and professional harassment that can come with social media advocacy.

"The pandemic has been really taxing for [health professionals](#)," said Royan, emergency medicine research fellow and clinical instructor of emergency medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. "In addition to the emotional toll caring for these very sick patients, particularly in the early waves of the pandemic, the politicization around COVID-19 added another layer of stress for many of us. One thing we highlight in this paper is that these kind of groups can be a safe space for health professionals to talk about issues like harassment on social media to keep the fight against misinformation going."

IMPACT and other health professional amplifiers are comprised of nurses, health economists, scientists, public health professionals and physicians, Royan said. They've endured public harassment and attacks after posting scientifically proven medical information about the COVID-19 virus and vaccines.

IMPACT has also created numerous easy-to-digest infographics in both English and Spanish around specific issues, such as the effectiveness of masking and social distancing, and how mRNA was used to create the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines. It is a creative way the group is trying to reach people who may not have been reading accurate health information, Royan said.

"We know that COVID-19 has disproportionately affected the Latino population, and it's been important to us to partner with [community organizations](#) like Illinois Unidos to ensure that we are also addressing misinformation with Spanish-language resources," Royan said.

The group has recently begun to combat [false information](#) about [reproductive health](#) issues following the U.S. Supreme Court's overturning of Roe v. Wade. They've also started disseminating information about firearm injury, such as a recent tweet that stated, "Fact: Mental illness is not an effective predictor of gun violence against others."

More information: Regina Royan et al, Use of Twitter Amplifiers by Medical Professionals to Combat Misinformation During the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Journal of Medical Internet Research* (2022). [DOI: 10.2196/38324](#)

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