

## 'Infodemic' During COVID-19 Pandemic: Troubleshooting the Trouble in Troubled Time Through Primary Care Activism

Dear Editor,

The problem of fake and falsified information available on the Internet and social media has seen torrential rise with its impact becoming more palpable during contemporary crisis. Its magnitude and unprecedented ill-effect grow with viral speed across geopolitical lines. Heads of world agencies like WHO (World Health Organization) and UN (United Nations) has referred to this phenomenon of an epidemic of misinformation as "infodemic" in the wake of current coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.<sup>[1]</sup> Fake news and misleading information, spreading faster than the virus, complicate the situation by supplying false data, false treatment advice, unscientific remedies, conspiracy theories, and xenophobia. Social-distancing and lockdown in many countries has propelled global access to numerous online sites, platforms, and social media groups and the data consumption, good or bad, has surged. Fighting this malady shall require global support and active involvement of major stakeholders in tow. WHO has attempted to fight the scourge of infodemic by collaborating with leading global players like Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, You Tube, and TikTok to check for irrelevant information and provide evidence-based information to the public.<sup>[2]</sup> Experts have encouraged people to practice re-confirmation of authentic information from bonafide health and international welfare agency websites such as WHO and UN. The infodemic is hampering the work of agencies such as EPI-WIN (Information network for epidemics), a subsidiary to WHO, that aims to provide right information to people so they follow right steps. Online posting and widespread visibility of legitimate sources shall require every reliable platform broadcasting similar information in an unprecedented global coordination. Machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI) assistance is now widely used in collecting and scanning online social media information (both human and bot generated) and separate wheat from chaff. According to dedicated portals, providing regularly updating information on infodemics, such as COVID19 Infodemics Observatory (a portal scanning global tweet statistics), suggests nearly 30% data categorized as unreliable news and thus contributing to infodemic.<sup>[3]</sup> The role of family physicians and primary care grass root workers in combating the rise of infodemic can be instrumental. They can individually or in groups create online fora, support groups, and communication avenues to bust bad news and provide legitimate information in easy languages. The local influencing peoples can be roped in to maximize outreach and family

physicians can do it better than layperson. This pandemic shall pass but infodemic may persist in post-COVID world and shall require perennial vigil. The constant fight against this new adversary calls for all primary healthcare personnel be its foot soldiers and do their bit to make it irrelevant.

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### Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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