

Help Patients Navigate COVID-19 Misinformation

A deluge of COVID-19 social media posts will have **patients asking you how to identify trustworthy information and resources**.

Remain open to questions...be prepared with the latest facts...and help patients identify gaps in their understanding.

WHO wrote it and WHERE is it from? Advise checking the author's expertise and credentials...and looking for the original source.

Remind patients to take social media posts and news headlines with a grain of salt. Recommend cross-checking info with reputable sources, such as CDC.gov or MedlinePlus.gov...especially before sharing.

But explain even reputable sources may make a misstep when rushing to get info out. For instance, some studies are being published before undergoing peer review...others are being retracted.

WHAT is being presented? Tell patients to be leery of info that sounds too good to be true or triggers emotion. Reliable resources don't use terms such as "the best" or "clinically proven."

Recommend not to rely on ads or testimonials...and watch for conflicts of interest, such as an author trying to promote a product.

Also help put study outcomes in perspective.

For example, early reports that hydroxychloroquine prevents SARS-CoV-2 from multiplying in a lab haven't panned out in humans...and hydroxychloroquine isn't likely to be effective for treating COVID-19.

WHEN was it written? Advise paying attention to publication dates...especially with quickly evolving COVID-19 recommendations.

For instance, within a 3-month period, FDA authorized hydroxychloroquine for emergency use...then cautioned about risk of arrhythmias...and now the authorization is revoked.

Explain that each clinical trial is just one piece of the puzzle...and sometimes we need to "watch and wait," even in a pandemic.

For example, many experts advise limiting steroids for COVID-19. A new trial suggests dexamethasone improves outcomes in severe cases. But educate that all early data should be approached cautiously.

Expect meds for COVID-19 to continue to be a moving target.

Explore our *COVID-19 Resource Hub* and *COVID-19 and Pharmacotherapy* chart to keep up with accurate med info...to address misinformation.

Key References:

- J Gen Intern Med Published online May 14, 2020; doi:10.1007/s11606-020-05897-w
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- Postgrad Med J 2020;96(1131):4-6
- www.nccih.nih.gov/health/finding-and-evaluating-online-resources (6-22-20)
- www.covid19treatmentguidelines.nih.gov/ (6-22-20)

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