Committee: WHO
Topic: Combating Medical Misinformation on Social Media Platforms
Chair: Ana Fernanda Garcia Paquot
Moderator: Carla Aguirre de Leon

Overview of the Problem

Medical misinformation on social media has become a growing global concern, affecting how people understand health issues and make medical decisions. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and X allow false health claims to spread rapidly, often reaching millions of users before accurate information can be provided. This problem is further complicated by AI, misleading influencers, and the lack of effective content regulation. WHO must address these challenges by promoting reliable health information, strengthening public trust in medical institutions, and encouraging responsible communication in digital platforms.

The world health organization (WHO) plays an essential role in maintaining public confidence in scientific and medical acknowledgement. In the digital era, social media has created new challenges for communicating accurate health information. Unverified medical claims can influence people's perceptions of healthcare and shape their attitudes towards important public health measures. This has been particularly evident in discussions surrounding vaccination, where misleading online content has contributed to public hesitation and resistance. Although digital platforms have the potential to improve health education, their effectiveness depends on ensuring that users have access to trustworthy,evidence-based resources (Rodrigues et al., 2024).

Social media platforms like Instagram, X, and TikTok are primarily the most influential social media where millions of people turn for advice, whether it is through wellness influencers, or self-tracked recovery journeys. Yet these channels do not prioritise clinical fidelity. Online visibility frequently bypasses formal medical credentials, prioritizing audience engagement over peer-reviewed accuracy.

The principal conflict is the erosion of the public trust in credible scientific institutions combined with the extreme difficulty of correcting false information once it goes viral.

The most delicate topics needed for addressing is the absence of control and oversight in social media. For instance, Instagram, functions as an informal but potent source of public health infrastructure. Yet, unlike any clinical body, it is not held to any standard of evidence, harm protection, or ethical health communication. In the post-pandemic era, where lay users increasingly self-manage, self-diagnose, and share their own health content, we are witnessing an alarming shift: platform visibility is mistaken for legitimacy. In addition AI tools are altering this concern substantially with deepfakes, further spreading misinformation in social media. A recent investigation published in April 2024 examined the reliability of artificial intelligence when responding to medical inquiries. The findings raised concerns about the accuracy of systems, particularly when addressing health subjects frequently affected by misinformation. The results indicated that a significant number of answers contained factual errors, while their supporting references were often unreliable, incomplete, or nonexistent. Researchers also identified difficulties in the clarity of the responses, noting that some explanations were unnecessarily complicated. Furthermore, AI systems showed limitations when confronted with misleading or challenging questions, as they rarely provided sufficient warnings or declined to answer when appropriate. These findings highlight the risks of relying on artificial intelligence for medical guidance without proper verification (DocGuide, n.d.).

Introduction

Medical misinformation on social media is one of the greatest threats to global public health in the 21st century, and that is why this topic matters.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Health Organization did not just declare a pandemic, but also an “infodemic”. A lot of information, both true and false, spread faster than the virus itself. People refused life-saving vaccines, consumed dangerous substances like bleach, and avoided hospitals because of a video that they encountered on Tiktok or on Whatsapp.

Medical misinformation is false health information shared without the intent to harm, such as someone sharing that garlic cures cancer because they genuinely believe it.

This is different from disinformation, which is false information deliberately created to deceive for profit or political gain. Both are amplified by algorithm amplification, where social media platforms promote sensational and emotional content because it gets more engagement, trapping users in echo chambers where they only see information that confirms their beliefs. This process has created the WHO defined infodemic, which directly fuels phenomena like vaccine hesitancy, listed by WHO as one of the most influential threats to global health.

The world must care about this issue because it literally kills and reverses decades of medical progress. Diseases like Measles, which were once declared eliminated in many countries, have returned due to anti-vaccine narratives online in countries like Romania, Brazil and Austria.

Misinformation collapses health systems by encouraging unproven home remedies, causes governments to waste millions fighting preventable outbreaks, and most importantly, it disproportionately harms the global south, where lower digital literacy and a lack of fact-checking resources in local languages make communities on platforms like Facebook and Whatsapp especially vulnerable.

Historical Background

Medical inaccuracies have circulated historically, yet contemporary digital networks expedite their reach, making it easier for false health claims to reach large audiences in a short amount of time. Research published in 2018 documented how online bots and other accounts amplified discussion about vaccines, showing how digital platforms can influence the spread of misleading information online. Today, social media algorithms and online communities can make these claims more visible, making it difficult for others to distinguish reliable medical advice from false information.

The problem became especially noticeable during the COVID-19 pandemic, when people around the world searched for information about the virus, vaccines, and possible solutions. As uncertainty increased, misleading claims spread online and created challenges for public health authorities. This made it clear that access to accurate information is essential, especially during emergencies.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, several efforts were made to address medical misinformation. Researchers worked hard to identify the major sources of false information, while media organizations dedicated more resources investigating and correcting misleading claims about the virus. Governments also increased their efforts to provide clear public health information, often working with trusted community leaders and healthcare professionals to reach a wider audience

WHO has also worked with technology companies and other partners, including Google, YouTube, and Facebook, to help people find reliable health information and address the spread of misleading content. These efforts have helped bring greater attention to the issue. However, medical misinformation remains a global challenge, showing the need for continued cooperation between governments, healthcare professionals, researchers, and social media platforms.

The Situation Today

According to a 2023 survey by the American Medical Association, 38% of rural people reported encountering a widespread of misinformation from their patients, 22% of suburban physicians and 25% of urban physicians, 86% of physicians feel that the incidence of medical misinformation/disinformation has increased compared to 5 years ago (The Physicians Foundation, n.d.). The most delicate concern is how arduous work must be done to eradicate the amount of content creators who influence the issue and keep playing against the medical infrastructures who try to oppose this movement of misinformation or are not even conscious of the harm towards the world they keep making.

If the issue keeps spreading some of the issues would be the resurgence of preventable diseases to return because of fewer people getting vaccinated, dangerous self treatment, and saturation in hospitals with cases that could have been avoided if medical information would have been distributed ethically and responsibly. In another

way, it would break the trust of patients in doctors and medical professionals, and create a second health system based on viral trends instead of science, and increasing anxiety resulting from inaccurate self-diagnosis. In the long term, it reduces life expectancy in affected societies and creates high costs for governments.

Key Stakeholders and Their Positions

Medical disinformation on social media affects many groups around the world. Governments, international organizations, non-profit organizations, social media companies, and ordinary people will have an important role in this issue. However, each group has different interests and opinions about how the problem should be addressed. Understanding these perspectives can help delegates identify possible disagreements and find solutions that benefit different countries.

Countries

Different countries face medical disinformation in different ways depending on their population, healthcare systems, technology, and available resources.

- The *United States* is concerned about the spread of false information, especially regarding vaccines and public health. It supports scientific research, public health education, and cooperation with technology companies. However, there are also debates about how much governments should regulate online content without limiting freedom of expression.
- *India* faces challenges related to its large population, widespread social media use, and many regional languages. Its priorities include improving public health communication, reaching rural communities, and making reliable medical information available in different languages

- *Brazil* experienced significant challenges with medical misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Important concerns include rebuilding public trust in healthcare institutions, improving vaccination awareness, and making accurate health information easier to access

- African nations facing infrastructural limits often prioritize expanding basic digital connection alongside local public health advisors especially those with limited healthcare and technological resources. Their priorities may face additional difficulties. Some communities have less access to reliable medical information, internet services, and healthcare professionals. Their priorities may include receiving international support, improving health education, and developing affordable technology to identify misinformation

International Organization

International organizations help countries coordinate their efforts and develop strategies to fight medical misinformation. WHO works to provide scientifically accurate health information, support governments, and develop strategies to manage infodemics. Its main priority is protecting public health and ensuring that people have access to trustworthy medical information. UNESCO focuses on education and media literacy. It wants people to develop critical thinking skills so they can recognize false information and evaluate online sources. UNICEF is also involved because children are frequently exposed to the information on social media. The World Bank can contribute by supporting countries that need financial resources to strengthen their healthcare systems and digital infrastructure. This is especially important for countries that need funding to develop effective programs against medical misinformation

Non-profit organizations

Non-profit organizations help fight medical misinformation through research, education, fact-checking, and public awareness campaigns. For example:

- Africa Check is an organization that verifies information and investigates misleading claims across several African countries. It also provides educational resources and trains journalists to recognize false information
- Meedan is a non-profit organization that develops digital tools and works with journalists and civil society groups to help communities access and verify information. Its work also focuses on making reliable information available to people regardless of their language or location.

These organizations generally support greater transparency, access to reliable information, and cooperation between communities, governments, and healthcare professionals

Business

Social media companies are among the most important stakeholders because their platforms are where much of the medical misinformation is shared. Companies such as Meta (Facebook and Instagram), Google (YouTube), and TikTok face increasing pressure to reduce the spread of false medical claims while protecting freedom of expression. These companies have an interest in keeping their platforms safe and maintaining the users' trust while upholding content moderation standards. However, they must also consider their business interest, content moderation costs, privacy concerns, and the possibility of removing real information by mistake. WHO has previously worked with technology companies, including: YouTube, Google, and Meta, to improve their policies and respond to harmful medical misinformation.

General Population and Communities

Ordinary people are directly affected by medical misinformation because many use social media to learn about diseases, treatments, vaccines, and general health advice. Communities and people with limited access to healthcare or reliable information may face additional difficulties when trying to identify trustworthy sources. Healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses, and pharmacists, are also important stakeholders because they provide accurate medical advice and help patients understand health information. However, misinformation can make their work more

difficult when people trust online claims instead of professional guidance. Most communities want accessible, understandable, and trustworthy medical information. They also want to be taken seriously by healthcare institutions and their governments

Why does each group feel the way they do?

Although these stakeholders are affected by media disinformation, their priorities are not always the same. Some governments focus on protecting freedom of expression, while others support stronger regulations to control false information. Developing countries may need financial and technological support before introducing new policies, while social media companies must balance public safety and their business responsibilities. Meanwhile, ordinary people mainly want to know which health information to trust

Past Attempts and Existing Frameworks

Medical disinformation became a bigger international concern during COVID-19, when false health information spread quickly through social media. Since then, WHO, the UN, and other organizations have created different initiatives to help people access reliable information and recognize misleading health claims. One key benchmark is resolution WHA73.1, adopted by the World Health Assembly in 2020. It recognized that fighting misinformation was an important part of controlling the COVID-19 pandemic. It encouraged countries to share reliable information and take action against false health claims while respecting freedom of expression. Another example is EPI-WIN (WHO‘s Information Network for Epidemics), a specialized agency platform launched in 2020 that makes scientific information easier to understand and accessible to different communities. It uses educational resources, webinars, and updates to help people receive accurate information during health emergencies. WHO has also developed infodemic management's strategies to understand public concerns and respond to misleading information. The UN also launched the Verified Initiative in May 2020 to fight misinformation during COVID-19
.Its goal was to share accurate information about science, solidarity, and solutions. It encouraged people to become information volunteers and share trustworthy content with their communities. UNESCO has also contributed through its Media and Information Literacy program. These programs help people develop critical thinking skills, evaluate online sources, and recognize misinformation. They also encourage countries to include media literacy in their education system. Although these initiatives

have helped increase awareness and provide access to reliable information, medical misinformation continues to spread online. Some countries still lack the financial resources, technology, and education programs needed to address the problem. There is also a need for stronger cooperation between governments, healthcare institutions, and social media companies. More work is needed to make reliable health information accessible to everyone, regardless of their country or economic situation.

Challenges and Complications

Medical disinformation is a difficult issue to solve because every country faces different challenges. Political disagreements can make it harder to create international rules, since some governments may have different opinions about how misinformation should be controlled without affecting freedom of speech. Another major problem is the lack of resources, especially in developing countries that may not have enough funding for healthcare education, fact-checking programs, or advanced technology. Technology also makes this issue more complicated. AI, chatbots, fake accounts, and manipulated images help misleading information to spread quickly and become harder to recognize. In addition, countries have different laws regarding online content, privacy, censorship and the responsibilities of social media companies, which makes international cooperation more difficult. Cultural and religious differences can also influence how people receive health information. Some communities may trust traditional beliefs or religious leaders or more than official healthcare institutions. At the same time, previous healthcare failure, corruption, and unequal access to medical services can make people lose their trust in doctors and health organizations. Language barriers are another concern because reliable medical information is not always available in local languages, making it harder for certain communities to identify false information. These challenges are important because a solution that works in one country may not work in another.

The Committee's Role and Powers

The World Health Organization is a specialized agency of the UN that works to improve global health and support countries dealing with health related problems. In this committee, delegates will discuss the growing problem of medical disinformation on social media and work together to find possible international solutions. Their goal is to improve access to reliable health information, encourage cooperation between countries, and help protect people from misleading medical content. WHO has the ability to discuss international health concerns, provide scientific guidance, and recommend policies that member states can follow. It can also encourage cooperation between governments, healthcare institutions, and social media companies. Through research, educational programs and international partnerships, WHO helps countries improve public health. However, WHO cannot force countries to follow its recommendations or directly control social media platforms. Its influence depends mainly on international cooperation and the willingness of Member States to take action. During the committee sessions, delegates will work together to make a draft resolution with proposals to address medical misinformation. These proposals may include educational campaigns to improve health literacy, international programs to identify false medical information, and guidelines encouraging social media companies to promote reliable health content. Delegates may also suggest programs to support developing countries that have fewer financial and technological resources, as well as strategies to rebuild public trust in healthcare professionals and institutions. WHO also works with other UN organizations to address different aspects of global health. The United Nations Department of Global Communications campaigns, and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) works on digital technology and telecommunications. These partnerships allow countries and organizations to approach medical misinformation from different perspectives. Throughout the debate, delegates must respect the sovereignty of all Member States and maintain diplomatic and respectful communication. They should support their arguments with reliable scientific evidence, avoid discriminatory language, and focus on realistic solutions that can be achieved through international cooperation. Delegates must also follow the procedure when participating

Guiding Questions for Debate

1- How can governments and health institutions rebuild public trust in doctors and scientific information when many people trust social media influencers and chatbots more?

2- To what extent should social media platforms be held responsible for the spread of medical misinformation, and where should the responsibility of individual users begin?

3- How can countries combat medical misinformation on social media without violating freedom of speech or limiting access to reliable health information?

4- Why do people in some countries trust online health advice more than official medical institutions, and how do differences in healthcare systems, education, and culture contribute to this problem?

5- Should governments have the authority to remove or restrict misleading medical content, even if doing so could be considered censorship?

6- How can countries ensure that people in rural, low-income, and underserved communities have equal access to trustworthy medical information?

7- What measures can be taken to prevent social media influencers and content creators from spreading dangerous medical advice for popularity or financial gain?

8- How can governments and international organizations cooperate to address medical misinformation when countries have different laws, political priorities, and approaches to freedom of expression?

9- Should social media platforms be required to verify medical information before allowing users to share it? And who should be responsible for deciding what information is scientifically accurate?

10- How can WHO encourage social media companies to prioritize accurate medical information over content that generates more views and engagement?

11- What strategies can be developed to educate younger generations about identifying and avoiding medical misinformation online?

Conclusion and Call to Action

The delegations are needed for taking action because medical misinformation spreads quickly and can put people's health at risk. False information can lead people to make unsafe medical decisions and lose trust in reliable healthcare advice. During this conference, delegates will be given an opportunity to express their beliefs on the issue, exchange perspectives, and develop concrete solutions to tackle this global problem. In committee sessions, the delegate's main focus should be building workable initiatives that would provide people with access to trust-worthy medical information, raise awareness and develop a sense of trust towards medical institutions and practitioners. Please keep in mind that various countries experience different challenges in this respect, therefore cooperation and willingness to understand each other are essential for obtaining successful outcomes of the negotiations. The delegate's involvement in the discussions, argumentation and decisions can help contribute to formulating proposals that would help protect people and improve access to reliable information all over the world.

References

Assoue, S. (n.d.). *UN launches new initiative to fight COVID-19 misinformation through 'digital first responders'*. UN News. Retrieved November 4, 2026, from https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/05/1064622

Boden, S. (n.d.). *New global health misinformation survey reveals deep divides*. CIDRAP. Retrieved November 4, 2026, from https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/public-health/new-global-health-misinformation-survey-reveals-deep-divides

Bradd, S. (n.d.). *The covid-19 Infodemic*. World Health Organization. https://www.who.int/health-topics/infodemic/the-covid-19-infodemic

Chou Et Al. (2020, October). *A Prologue to the Special Issue*. Health misinformation in social media. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7532321/

Chou Et Al. (2020, October). *Where Do We Go From Here?* Health misinformation in social media. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7532328/

Cullinan, K. (2025, May 19). *Country After Country Endorse Pandemic Agreement in Enormous Show of Support*. World Health Assembly 78. https://healthpolicy-watch.news/country-after-country-endorses-pandemic-agreement-in-enormous-show-of-support/

Dugas Et Al. (2024, September 30). *Finding the Fake*. Boosting Resistance to Health Misinformation in Jordan with a WhatsApp Chatbot Game. https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099227409302412051

The Effect of Misinformation and Disinformation on Physicians' Ability to Provide Quality Care. (n.d.). The Physicians Foundation. Retrieved November 3, 2026, from https://physiciansfoundation.org/research/the-effect-of-misinformation-and-disinformation-on-physicians-ability-to-provide-quality-care/

Et al, T. (2026, April 14). *Generative artificial intelligence-driven chatbots and medical misinformation: an accuracy, referencing and readability audit*. BMJ Open. Retrieved October 29, 2026, from https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/16/4/e112695

Fides - A network of healthcare influencers. (n.d.). World Health Organization (WHO). Retrieved November 4, 2026, from https://www.who.int/teams/digital-health-and-innovation/digital-channels/fides

Gaysynsky Etal. (2020, October 1). *where we go from here*. Misinformation in social media. https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/full/10.2105/AJPH.2020.305905

Generative artificial intelligence-driven chatbots and medical misinformation: an accuracy, referencing and readability audit. (n.d.). BMJ Open. Retrieved November 3, 2026, from https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/16/4/e112695

The hidden cost of health misinformation: distrust, treatment refusal, and the burden on healthcare professionals. (n.d.). Frontiers. Retrieved November 3, 2026, from https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/medicine/articles/10.3389/fmed.2026.1842755/full

How to reduce the impact of disinformation on Europeans' health. (n.d.). European Parliament. Retrieved November 4, 2026, from https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2024/754205/IPOL_STU(2024)754205_EN.pdf

Kent, R. (2025, June 30). *When Health Misinformation Kills: Social Media, Visibility, and the Crisis of Regulation | Feature from King's College London*. King's College London. Retrieved October 29, 2026, from https://www.kcl.ac.uk/when-health-misinformation-kills-social-media-visibility-and-the-crisis-of-regulation

Phase II: Global principles for identifying credible sources of health information on social media. (n.d.). World Health Organization (WHO). Retrieved November 4, 2026, from https://www.who.int/teams/digital-health-and-innovation/digital-channels/global-principles-for-identifying-credible-sources-of-health-information-on-social-media

Physicians expect pharma companies to counter 'narrative distortion' in health. (n.d.). Medical Marketing and Media. Retrieved November 3, 2026, from https://www.mmm-online.com/news/physicians-expect-pharma-companies-to-counter-narrative-distortion-in-health/

The Politics and Perverse Effects of the Fight Against Online Medical Misinformation. (n.d.). Yale Law Journal. Retrieved November 4, 2026, from

https://yalelawjournal.org/essay/the-politics-and-perverse-effects-of-the-fight-against-online-medical-misinformation

Sayeed, M. (2021, 08 05). *Prevalence and source analysis of COVID-19 misinformation of 138 countries*. The preprint server for health sciences. https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.05.08.21256879v1.full

Yeung Et Al. (2022, January 22). *Medical and Health-Related Misinformation on Social Media*. Bibliometric Study of Scientific Literature. https://www.jmir.org/2022/1/e28152/Nd