



Healthy Communities

Modul 5

Countering Disinformation



Co-funded by
the European Union

Partners involved:



www.bgz-berlin.de

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About the Project

With our **HEALTHY COMMUNITIES** project, we illustrate the contribution that adult education can strengthen the health skills of all citizens (including and especially groups with fewer opportunities), counteracting marginalization, and strengthening participation and commitment. One shortcoming of current health skills development programs is that they do not reach all population groups.

The project team has chosen to focus on the local community, in particular through the connection to the living environment in the community, which has so far only been elementary developed.

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Maintaining Health

1. Checklist to verify Health Information

- **Who created the information? Who is the publisher?**
 - It should be clear who created, publishes or distributes the information. The name and address of the provider and details on how to contact them directly should be visible in the legal notice.
 - If you have nothing to hide, you can also say who you are. Identifying who the provider of the information is a fundamental prerequisite for the reliability of an information source.
- **What are the goals and intentions of the information?**
 - It should be clear what the objectives of the information are and what purpose it is intended to fulfil. It should also be stated what the information is not intended for and what its limitations are, e.g. that it does not replace a visit to the doctor.
- **Are there scientific sources? Are sources indicated? And are there further sources?**
 - Can you identify who is professionally responsible for the content of the health information, and what qualifications the author or person responsible has? Pure opinions or personal experiences of non-experts or patients must not give the appearance of "scientific" information. The information provided should be substantiated by reputable sources. Providers of information should indicate the sources used and their currency as evidence. This is the only way to verify whether the information has been compiled according to the current state of scientific knowledge. As a rule, the most reliable information is that which is based on the results of large studies in which the effectiveness of an examination or treatment procedure has been proven.
 - ► Tips: The more specialized the information is, the more critically you should search for the author or the person responsible. So if it is basic information, you can be more generous than if you are dealing with a very specific, innovative therapy for a serious illness.
- **How up-to-date is the information?**
 - The information should be updated regularly. The research situation can change and the state of knowledge on medical and health topics is constantly expanding. If information on the Internet has not been updated for years, it may be out of date. You should be able to see when information was created or revised and when an update is planned.
 - Here too, the more specific the information, the more up-to-date it should be. If it is more general information on health and illness, you can be a little more generous with the creation date. If, on the other hand, it is information about a new cancer therapy, for example, the date is essential in order to be able to recognize whether it is actually a "new" therapy.
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- **Who finances the information? Are there commercial interests in the text?**
 - It should also be clear who finances, promotes and operates the information provided. This allows you to recognize whether there may be certain interests or dependencies of the information on sponsors or operators that could influence the content. Health information on the Internet should be free of charge and freely accessible.
- **How independent is the source? Is the information balanced?**
 - The information should be formulated neutrally in terms of content and language. It should not urge the user to try a particular product or method but should always point out several options and name their advantages and disadvantages. If a publisher formulates their own summarized assessments or recommendations, these should be clearly recognizable in the information and their own statements should be clearly differentiated from evidence-based professional statements.
 - In the case of information on therapies or treatment methods, further information must be provided in addition to the benefits, for example on risks and other treatment options. If there are differing opinions in research, this must be pointed out.
 - ► Tips: The following phrases should set off all your alarm sirens: "Absolutely free of side effects", "100% guarantee of effectiveness", "panacea" or "only available for a short time" (see also criterion 8). Texts containing such formulations are usually advertising. The same applies when you read the enthusiastic report of a cured patient. Even if this patient exists, it does not mean that the treatment will work for you.

Sources:

- <https://www.gesund-im-netz.net/home/wegweiser/qualitaetgesundheitsinformationen/>
- <https://www.verbraucherzentrale.de/wissen/gesundheit-pflege/medikamente/symptome-googeln-vorsicht-bei-gesundheitlichem-rat-aus-dem-internet-10424#1>

2. Examples of Group Work

Vitamin supplements can cure cancer completely. Buy our product today to stay healthy!’

Manipulation feature: Exaggerated claim, commercial interest.

‘Regular vaccination causes autism. This truth is concealed by the pharmaceutical industry.’

Manipulation feature: Emotionally charged language, no scientific basis.

‘Drinking three litres of water every day completely detoxifies the body and prevents all diseases.’

Error: Exaggeration of health benefits, lack of scientific evidence.

‘All foods with sugar are unhealthy and should be avoided completely.’

Error: General statement without differentiation (amount and type of sugar).

‘Regular exercise, such as walking for 30 minutes a day, can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.’

Characteristic: Supported by scientific studies.

Annex

Presentation

Developed and project coordination:

BGZ Berliner Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit mbH
(Berlin Association for International Cooperation)

www.healthycommunities.eu

Project Partner

Caritas der Erzdiözese Wien - Hilfe in Not

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Stowarzyszenie Trenerskie Organizacji Pozarzadowych

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Healthy Communities

Social space-orientated health education for vulnerable groups to strengthen resilience and social cohesion

Module 5



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Introduction to disinformation in the health sector

Understanding the threat: disinformation in public health

This session will be about



Understand what
disinformation is and why
it is problematic in the
health sector.



Exchange of
personal
experiences.



Getting to know
tools for recognizing
disinformation.

Introduction and objectives

- **Misinformation** is the spread of false information without the intent to mislead. Those who share the misinformation may believe it is true, useful or interesting, and have no malicious intent towards the recipients they are sharing it with.
- **Disinformation** is designed or spread with full knowledge of it being false (information has been manipulated), as part of an intention to deceive and cause harm. The motivations can be economic gain, ideological, religious, political or in support of a social agenda among others.
- Both misinformation and disinformation may cause harm, which comprises threats to decision-making processes as well as health, environment or security.
- ☐ The key difference between disinformation and misinformation is not the content of the falsehood but the knowledge and intention of the sender.

Introduction to disinformation in the health sector

Part 1

Understanding the threat: Disinformation in public health

Group work on a “fake news video”

(see video links in the curricula)

- What fake news have you experienced?
- How does disinformation spread?
- Was there anything in the video that surprised you?
- Where are they relevant in the healthcare sector?

Small group work

Get together in groups of 3.

- Do you agree with the statements?
- What is problematic about the statements?
- Is the language clear and factual, or emotional/manipulative?

Take Aways

- How can we use what we have learned in everyday life?
- How can you apply what you have learned in your role as a health guide?

Introduction to the spread of disinformation in the healthcare sector

Part 2

Critical thinking and source evaluation

Conscious decisions: Assessing the reliability of health sources

Why critical thinking is important

- Health information influences important life decisions, e.g. about vaccinations, nutrition or treatment options.
- Disinformation can lead to wrong decisions that endanger health.
- The consequences: Health risks, uncertainty, social polarization

Discussion about the video

- What are the motives for spreading disinformation?
- What can be done to check this?

Checklist

The multitude of information on the Internet requires simple means to distinguish real from false information.

- **Source:** Who is behind the information? Is it a credible institution or an expert?
- **Check facts:** Are there sources or scientific evidence?
- **Purpose:** Is the information neutral, or is it trying to manipulate?
- **Timeliness:** How old is the information?

Group work: Evaluating the credibility of sources

- Task: Evaluate various sources using the checklist.
- What is maybe problematic with the statements?
- Is the language clear and factual or emotional/manipulative?

Introduction to the spread of disinformation in the healthcare sector

Part 3

Practical application and development of strategies

Debunking fake news: methods in practice

Goals:

1. Practicing methods for identifying and refuting fake news.
2. Develop practical approaches for dealing with disinformation.
3. Reflecting on your own role and responsibility as a health guide.

What is fact-checking?

- Fact checkers uncover false reports and correct them with their research. In doing so, they make a significant contribution to clarifying false reports.
- Content identified as false information is corrected on the websites of the fact-checking organizations, in their newsletters and on social media. Platforms such as Facebook also mark the false reports with a warning so that everyone can see that independent fact-checkers classify the post as untrustworthy.
- It is important to disseminate the corrected facts where people may come into contact with the false report.

Where can I find good information?

- AFT-Fact check: <https://factcheck.afp.com/>
 - AFP Fact Check Part of Agence France-Presse (AFP), a multilingual, multicultural news agency
- Reverse image search : [TinEye](#) or [Google Reverse Image Search](#)

Good health information on the Internet

- World Health Organization: www.who.int/europe
- Be careful when searching with commercial search engines
 - The hit lists of search engines are not or not only oriented towards medical and scientific quality.
 - Think about other search engines and internet browsers
 - have a look at your data protection settings in your browser
 - Try: Ecosia, DuckDuckGo, or Startpage as search engines

Role play on information search

- Get together in pairs
- One person asks a question
 - For example, an acquaintance asks: "I've heard that vaccinations cause autism. Is that true?"
- Play through your approach as a health guide
- Together you try to check this question

Reflection and Feedback

- What were the biggest challenges?
- Which methods did you find particularly helpful?
- How can the techniques you learned be applied in everyday life?

Sources

- Understanding disinformation in the context of public health emergencies: the case of COVID-19. Saif F. Abed, Sophie Allain-loos and Nahoko Shindo <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/375832/WER9904-38-48.pdf>
- Alexander Bondarenko, Ekaterina Shirshakova, Marina Driker, Matthias Hagen, and Pavel Braslavski. 2021. Misbeliefs and Biases in Health-Related Searches. In Proceedings of the 30th ACM International Conference on Information & Knowledge Management (CIKM '21). Association for Computing Machinery, New York, NY, USA, 2894–2899. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3459637.3482141>

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