

Honing Our Information and Research Literacy Skills in the “Fake News” Era

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The rampant distribution of fake health and lifestyle news, and pseudoscientific advice on human development and disorders, including developmental disorders (WHO, 2016), is insidious, deceptive and potentially dangerous (Bowen & Snow, 2017). The spread of this misinformation is particularly apparent on the internet now that over 50% of the world’s population has access to it, and almost 43% (3.1 billion people) engage in social media (ITU, 2017). Half-truths, spin and conspiracy theories around public health issues (e.g., MMR vaccination; nutrition), conditions (e.g., cancer; HIV) and disorders (e.g., autism; intellectual disability) are often distributed more widely on the web than evidence-based reports from high quality peer reviewed journals and reputable news organisations. For instance, of the 20 most-shared articles on Facebook in 2016 with “cancer” in the headline, over half reported claims discredited by doctors and health authorities or, in the case of the year’s top story—directly by the legitimate researchers misrepresented in the article (Forster, 2017). Worryingly, comparable disinformation emanates from ostensibly conservative, trusted sources too.

Inevitably, the tension between science and pseudoscience generates concern and action among three important groups of social media “influencers”. First, responsible academic and mass media **publishers and journalists**; second, bona fide **health and education academics and practitioners** from disciplines that include allied health, dentistry, medicine, nursing, psychology, rehabilitation science, and teaching; and third, **advocates for people with a disability**, including parents. In their various ways, they shoulder the challenge of countering pseudoscience while asserting the need for better information and research literacy, and regard for evidence-based practice (EBP).

CONTENT

In this event, Dr Bowen draws on the research behind Bowen, Snow, & Brandon (expected 2024) comparing the characteristics of scientific versus pseudoscientific “therapies”; exploring the threats to practice, the professions, clients and the community posed by fad interventions for children and young people with developmental disorders, and their families; emphasising research literacy and information literacy; and proposing responses to and remedies for ethical dilemmas around pseudoscience in everyday practice.

LEARNER OBJECTIVES Participants will

- consider the spread and impact of fake health-and-lifestyle information, complementary and alternative medicine, and dubious education practices, and the credibility given to pseudoscience.
- examine the issues around opportunity cost.
- explore closely the attributes of Information Literacy and Research Literacy and their application in professional practice.

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