








What are some common types of health misinformation?

 Memes that were created as a joke, but people started re-sharing thinking it was true.	 Websites that look professional but the stories are all false or misleading.	 Quotations where the beginning or end have been deleted to change the meaning.	 Cherry-picked statistics. Without all the data, people haven't provided all the context.	 Misleading graphs or diagrams that look official but don't tell the whole story.	 Old images that recirculate as if they are actually very recent.	 Videos that have been edited to change the meaning.
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Office of the U.S. Surgeon General

Read the Health Misinformation Community Toolkit at [SurgeonGeneral.gov/HealthMisinformation](https://www.surgeongeneral.gov/HealthMisinformation)



Combat the infodemic during this pandemic

By Park Rapids Enterprise Editorial Board

Perhaps social media is to blame for the notion that all opinions are of equal value, that opinions aren't subject to scrutiny and that listening to information from people with expertise, knowledge and training makes you "sheep," "propagandists" or "farmongers."

When you have legal troubles, you talk to a reputable lawyer.

When your car needs repair, you go to a sound mechanic.

When you need heart surgery, you want an expert surgeon.

Why? Because their hands-on skills, insight and education hold value.

As journalists, it's our duty to verify statements before we publish them, particularly if they're false or misleading statements that could cause harm. Especially during a pandemic where our community is rife with false information that is dangerous. It affects our readers' health.

Our reporter did his job as a news reporter by checking a parent's comments at a school board meeting against those of a county public health official.

The Society of Professional Journalists' code of ethics tells us "to seek the truth and report it. Take responsibility for the accuracy of your work. Verify it before releasing it."

That is the core of news reporting.

When covering the news, journalists verify, double- and even triple-check sources.

Newspapers aren't obligated to publish someone's opinion if it is false or

Health Misinformation Checklist



Use this checklist every time you come across health-related content you are not sure about.

- Did you check with the CDC or local public health department to see whether there is any information about the claim being made?
- Did you ask a credible health care professional such as your doctor or nurse if they have any additional information?
- Did you type the claim into a search engine to see if it has been verified by a credible source?
- Did you look at the "About Us" page on the website to see if you can trust the source?
- If you're not sure, don't share!

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misleading or widely debunked. While freedom of speech is a fundamental right, it is not absolute and it is subject to restrictions. As courts have ruled, you don't have the freedom to yell "fire!" in a crowded movie theater.

When someone claims medical knowledge, journalists don't simply repeat their statements. We turn to local, regional, state or federal health care professionals for the latest, scientifically proven information. There are numerous credible health sources geared toward journalists: Poynter's International Fact Checking Network, FirstDraftNews.org, FactCheck.org, PolitiFact, the Association of Health Care Journalists and many more.

Citizens should apply the same rigorous fact-checking to what they see on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok and elsewhere. Talk to your local health care provider. Visit the John Hopkins University of Medicine, Centers for Disease

Control, World Health Organization, local public health agencies and the Minnesota Department of Health for their continuous updates.

The spread of misinformation is a great threat to our democracy.

Should we all have a healthy dose of skepticism? Yes.

That's why we should be cautious about making health decisions based on celebrities' comments, like Aaron Rodgers or Nicki Minaj. That's why we should disregard a business that is spreading disinformation in order to sell their own "alternative products." That's why we should question politicians who share outlandish, unproven conspiracy theories at town hall meetings.

Everyone should learn how to spot misinformation and its evil twin sister, disinformation.

It's just good, plain common sense - something Minnesotans used to understand and appreciate.

LETTERS

Gratitude fills my heart for nurses, aides, hospice volunteers

To the editor:

November is National Hospice Month. Hospice recognizes that death is not a single event, but a process requiring support. How appropriate that Thanksgiving shares time with this remarkable service. Gratitude fills my heart for the nurses, personal care aides, volunteers, and all those who answer the call to be with our friends and family during this cycle of their life.

Hospice provides valuable assistance in the care and decisions needed as families cope with the complex physical, emotional and spiritual questions created while facing the presence of dying. We have not been shown how to do this in our Western culture. Hollywood presented conflicting images and our churches often avoid the deeper fears.

I moved back to my hometown 10 years ago and was hired as a massage therapist for Hospice of Douglas County. It has been a deeply rewarding part of my life. I have learned to support people where they are rather than where I think they should be. I have learned that presence with compassion is more effective than technique. I have witnessed the pain relieving power of the lightest touch on a body weary with pain.

During my time here, I also taught many people how to help others with compassionate touch. So much is communicated in the touch of a hand on a hand...support, love, safety, acceptance, forgiveness, gratitude.

I will be retiring soon. If you know of a massage therapist who might be ready for a life-changing role, please refer them to Hospice of Douglas County.

Lavonne Marie Schildt
Alexandria, MN

It's time to thank health care workers again

Kelly Helmbrecht says she used to be the queen of compartmentalizing. No matter what the Alomere Health social worker encountered, she was usually able to leave it at work.

Not so much anymore. After nearly two years of the pandemic, she lies awake nights, wondering how to find scarce beds for patients who need to be transferred. She wonders if all her coworkers scheduled to work the next day will be able to make it in, or if some will have to stay home because they need to quarantine, or their kids need to quarantine, and who will cover their shifts if they can't come in.

"The most challenging time in this entire pandemic is right now," Helmbrecht told me on Monday.

Douglas County hit a dismal number last week; it had the 28th highest COVID rate in the nation, according to the latest count by The New York Times. This week, it's 33rd in the nation, with 113 cases per 100,000 people. Our local health care workers are seeing it - and feeling it. Sick people are flooding the health care system, and about 25% of those who come to Alomere's emergency room are sick with COVID, says Alomere spokesman Edward Reif.

Here's the deal. This column is not intended to change anyone's mind about masking or getting vaccinated or social distancing. At this point, nobody



KAREN TOLKKINEN
Karen's Turn

really expects many people to suddenly change their minds about these things. But I just want to remind everyone that this pandemic is incredibly hard on health care workers.

Remember last year, when the pandemic first started, how our community supported health care workers with cards and food and hearts painted on their windows? So many people sent gestures of support to health care workers that Reif was hard-pressed to keep track of them all.

Well, you don't hear much about that anymore. That says to me that our community is tired. Alexandria is a kind-hearted place, one of the kindest I have encountered in my travels around the U.S. But I believe the pandemic has tired us out. We are worn out from the relentless stream of bad news about a virus that won't go away. We're tired of fighting over masks and vaccines. COVID long-haulers are worn out from symptoms that persist.

Health care workers are tired, as well. They got through the first year because of your support and because they hoped a vaccine would soon arrive and everything could go back to normal. Then a vaccine arrived, and only half of Douglas

County's eligible population chose to get it.

So they continue to help people who are struggling to breathe, and babies who catch it from their parents and whose oxygen levels are cratering and have to be helicoptered to Minneapolis.

They continue to watch coworkers leave their jobs for less stressful careers that are easier on their families. They continue to call and call and call, trying to find a bed for a patient who needs to be transferred, even though the answer is almost always no. They prepare fellow Alexandrians who have to be transferred hundreds of miles away from home. There have been times the only available bed is 300 miles away in Bismarck, North Dakota.

Many stay on the job because they love their coworkers, or because their faith helps them cope, and because they know they are needed.

But let's not fool ourselves. We can't take our healthcare workers for granted.

"There are times I've questioned should I stay in the medical field," Helmbrecht said. "I'm not going to lie about that."

Helmbrecht said she doesn't plan to leave. There's a big "but," though, in her words.

"It does come across my mind sometimes, how long can I keep this up, how long can I stay at this pace?" she said. "I don't have the answer to that yet."

"It's Our Turn" is a weekly column that rotates among members of the Echo Press editorial staff.

COMMENTARY

Infrastructure bill will benefit rural areas

In my travels across our state I often hear from people about the need to improve our infrastructure in rural areas. Minnesotans see problems with our infrastructure every day as they drive over one too many potholes in the winter, face significant delays to access materials and equipment for their businesses, or are unable to connect to high-speed internet.

But this month, with the signing of the bipartisan infrastructure bill, we addressed these urgent needs by investing in our nation's infrastructure. With 19 of my Republican Senate colleagues - including our neighbors Senators Hoeven and Cramer of North Dakota - we finally came together across party lines to pass a bill to fix our crumbling infrastructure and expand broadband access to every corner of Minnesota.

For Minnesota's farmers, this bill will help get crops to market and eliminate barriers to transporting key products, like fertilizer and seed. We've all heard about crowded ports and rail cars backed up for miles - how can we expect agricultural producers to do the critical work of feeding America without reliable transit? I've spoken with



AMY KLOBUCHAR
U.S. Senator (D-Minn.)

countless small business owners who agree, which is why I fought to set resources aside for projects like revamping our inland waterways, improving our highways, and updating our nation's rail network. These provisions take crucial steps to ensure deliveries and exports come and go on time.

This is all important, but competing in the 21st century isn't just about roads, bridges, and ports - it's also about making sure all Americans can access the internet, no matter their zip code. As co-chair of the bipartisan Senate Broadband Caucus, I fought to strengthen our broadband infrastructure to make it possible for families across the country to study, work, and connect with loved ones online.

This is especially significant in rural Minnesota, where an estimated 16 percent of households lack broadband at baseline speeds. Because of this federal funding, the high school student in

Otter Tail County will no longer need to drive 40 minutes from home to a liquor store parking lot to find adequate wi-fi to take her online biology quizzes. It will also enable doctors in rural areas to provide telehealth services to patients who don't otherwise have access to quality, affordable care.

As more of our farmers and ranchers get reliable broadband, they will be able to take advantage of precision technology that can monitor field conditions like soil health and crop growth and log weather. Increased access to high-speed internet will also make it possible for tractors with wireless connections to send real-time data back to farms, helping farmers control pests and manage runoff. This not only supports our local farms but also protects our nation's food supply.

With kids back in school and resources to help Minnesotans heading to communities across the state, there is much to be thankful for this holiday season. As we reflect on this great progress and head into the new year, I will continue to work on behalf of Minnesotans to ensure these improvements are made in a timely manner so we can continue moving our state forward.