Social Media Traps

Nearly one in three of the articles you'll find contain misinformation that's often harmful.

September 13, 2021 By Bob Barnett

Looking for cancer treatment info on Facebook, Twitter, Reddit or other social media sites? Nearly one in three of the articles you'll find contain misinformation that's often harmful, finds a study by the University of Utah's Huntsman Cancer Institute published in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute.

Researchers asked experts from the National Comprehensive Cancer Network, which develops evidence-based professional guidelines for cancer care, to evaluate 200 popular cancer-related articles on social media sites.

Misinformation, such as the misuse of evidence or the use of misleading titles, characterized 32.5% of the articles. More concerning: 30.5% contained possibly harmful information, such as encouraging people with cancer to delay potentially curative care, use unproven (and often expensive) therapies and self-medicate with toxic compounds. The harmful articles were more likely to be shared than more accurate ones.

Looking for reliable info? The American Cancer Society (cancer.org), itself a good source, recommends the American Society of Clinical Oncology (cancer.net), CancerWise (mdanderson.org/cancerwise), Medline Plus (nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/cancers.html), National Cancer Institute (cancer.gov), National Comprehensive Cancer Network (nccn.org) and Oncolink (oncolink.org).

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