

### INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms have become the leading sources for acquiring news, information, and education. Though accessibility to information has increased, reliability of such information should be scrutinized. With the goal of becoming health literate, individuals are searching online for education, but can the information found be harmful?

### Harmful Effects of Misinformation

- Short-term and/or long-term bodily harm because of misinformation.
- Community and/or ecological harm because of misinformation.
- May cause a negative relationship between the patient and the dental healthcare provider.
- Increased switching of providers.
- Targeted for Products/Promotion.

### Evidence Based Research

- “Online False or misleading oral health-related content has been propagated on social media to deceive people against fluoride’s economic and health benefits to prevent dental caries.”<sup>3</sup>
- “Most studies agree that YouTube includes scientifically incorrect and sometimes misleading health related details that could harm patient health.”<sup>5</sup>
- “...studies found a statistically significant association between dental caries and lower levels of OHL [oral health literacy]”<sup>2</sup>

### Role of the Dental Hygienist

- Educate patients on searching for trusted sources of information by applying evidence-based scientific approach.
- Guide patients toward trusted sources for information like those affiliated with government (.gov) and academic (.edu) agencies.
- Provide a safe, comfortable place for patients to discuss information they may have come across on the internet.

### Conclusion

It is estimated that approximately 4.8 billion individuals use social media globally.<sup>1</sup> It has been reported that up to 72.8% of social media users are seeking health-related information.<sup>6</sup> Reasons include information gathering, consumer social reviews of healthcare providers, social and emotional support, to be a part of health-related communities or forums to share and read about others’ experiences who may have a similar condition.

However, information and sources may not be supported by evidence-based research. With billions of individuals accessing social media, misinformation acquired during health information retrieval presents a concern for patients and the healthcare providers who treat them. It is the responsibility of dental hygienists as healthcare providers to educate patients on best practices when it comes to healthcare information retrieval and to provide tools to identify evidence-based sources of information.

1. Chaffey, D. (2023, June 7). Global Social Media Statistics Research Summary 2023 [June 2023]. Smart Insights. <https://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research/>
2. Firmino, R. T., Ferreira, F. M., Paiva, S. M., Granville-Garcia, A. F., Fraiz, F. C., & Martins, C. C. (2017). Oral health literacy and associated oral conditions. *The Journal of the American Dental Association*, 148(8), 604–613.
3. Lotto, M., Sá Menezes, T., Zakir Hussain, I., Tsao, S.-F., Ahmad Butt, Z., P Morita, P., & Cruvinel, T. (2022). Characterization of false or misleading fluoride content on Instagram: Infodemiology study. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 24(5). <https://doi.org/10.2196/37519>
4. Ruiz, M., Kabani, F., & Cotter, J. (2022). A review of true effects of oral health media hype on clients’ perception of treatment. *Canadian Journal of Dental Hygiene*, 56(1), 31–38.
5. Simsek, H., Buyuk, S. K., Cetinkaya, E., Tural, M., & Koseoglu, M. S. (2020). “How I whiten my teeth”: YouTubeTM as a patient information resource for teeth whitening. *BMC Oral Health*, 20(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12903-020-01172-w>
6. Sumayyia, M. D., Al-Madaney, M. M., & Almousawi, F. H. (2019). Health information on social media. Perceptions, attitudes, and practices of patients and their companions. *Saudi medical journal*, 40(12), 1294–1298. <https://doi.org/10.15537/smj.2019.12.24682>
7. Social Media Circles [Online Image]. DentalSEM. <https://www.dentalsem.co.uk/social-media/>
8. The Power of Social Media How Can You Use Social Media for Market Research [Online Image]. (2023) Maction Consulting. <https://maction.com/the-power-of-social-media-how-can-you-use-social-media-for-market-research/>

