

Mitigating Misinformation: Effectively Communicate with Skeptical-But-Persuadable Patients

Incorrect medical information can have devastating effects, especially if it's widely disseminated and believed. The spread of medical misinformation (false or misleading information about health and medicine) harms patients and erodes trust with providers.

To reduce the spread of medical misinformation, a group of leading health organizations commissioned research that can help physicians, specialty societies and certifying boards, health and healthcare organizations, and others.

Participants in the 'Mitigating Medical Misinformation Work Group' include the American Board of Emergency Medicine, American Board of Family Medicine, American Board of Internal Medicine/ABIM Foundation, American Board of Medical Specialties, American Board of Pediatrics, American College of Physicians, American Medical Association, American Osteopathic Association, American Public Health Association, Association of American Medical Colleges, Council of Medical Specialty Societies, Federation of State Medical Boards, National Hispanic Medical Association, and National Medical Association.

Medical Misinformation & 'Skeptical-But-Persuadable' Adults

Quantitative and qualitative research found shared beliefs among adults 25-45 years old who are most "skeptical-but-persuadable" about medical information. These are people who may not trust the medical guidance they receive but are open to changing their minds. They are an audience that healthcare has a huge opportunity to reach. Among these individuals:

- Most have and trust a primary care physician and their local doctor is their most-trusted source of medical information.
- They're uncertain if doctors in general have people's best interests in mind and are concerned about profit motives in healthcare—a root cause of mistrust.
- COVID did not significantly shift trust in doctors and science.
- They believe self-advocacy is needed to manage constant and conflicting information.
- Positive messages—about doctors, science, and misinformation—are preferable.
- Local organizations are seen as less biased and more reliable than national groups, media, or "celebrity doctors."

What Can Healthcare Professionals Do?

- **Affirm that people are "doing the right thing" by checking the facts.**
- **Provide guidance in a factual, balanced manner** that acknowledges their skepticism, doesn't belittle critics, and admits that guidance can change as knowledge increases.
- **Reinforce local providers** as trusted sources for people to talk with about their care.
- **Direct patients to vetted resources** prepared by independent, unbiased doctors.

Want to learn more? Read the research summary findings, available [here](#).