



# Digital Bulletin – Medical Misinformation

How many of us have found that when we are feeling under the weather, or if we have a medical concern, that our first course is to 'Google' the symptoms, condition, or diagnosis? For quite some time, this battle between readily accessible information on the internet and reliable medical advice from a professional has been discussed, with the clear message that internet searches are no replacement for an appointment with a doctor.

However, as mentioned in the previous Digital Bulletin, we should consider that for many young people, most of their information comes from various social media streams, where they can become bombarded by information or advice that they have in no way requested or sought.

## Adverts

I recently read an article discussing the rise in adverts for companies that offer self-diagnosis on TikTok. In an example of one such advert, the text asked viewers "are you a woman who is spacey? Forgetful? Or chatty?" and then suggesting that they may have attention deficit disorder. This advice has been described as "predatory" by oversimplifying health conditions and potentially leading to misdiagnosis. These companies often go on to offer expensive treatment for the conditions that have been suggested to viewers, leading to TikTok and also Meta (Facebook and Instagram) to ban some companies from their platform. However, there are many such companies that have not yet been picked up and the presence of such adverts on social media is still rife. Click [here](#) to read the full article.

## Mental Health

It has been widely reported that the recent pandemic has had a detrimental impact on the wellbeing and mental health of young people in particular. As a result, there has been a surge of mental health content online, with many organisations offering solutions or answers to the way people are feeling. It is important to remember that symptoms such as anxiety, anger and mood swings are not always connected to a condition. If you experiencing these symptoms, it is always good to talk to somebody else to get an objective opinion.

## Advice

There are some measures that you can consider to minimise the amount of worrying, scary or distressing content on your child's social media stream.

- Be wary of going straight to the sources at the top of your search results. These are usually paid advertisements and may not necessarily be your best choice
- Checking multiple sources is usually a wise move. Visit other trusted healthcare sites, such as NHS for general health information.
- Avoid sites with community-sourced content, such as Wikipedia, as the information provided may not be properly vetted by qualified professionals or may be out of date.
- Remember that user comments in forums, review sites and on social media often skew negative; if you do read them, look for thoughtful responses and ignore the scary stories and angry rants.
- Consider the commercial interest or potential biases of any web site you are visiting. Do they accept outside advertising and, if so, how might that influence their content? Are they directly trying to sell you a product (such as a web site sponsored by a pharmaceutical company or dietary supplement maker)? This doesn't necessarily mean that the information they provide is not reliable or credible, just that they need to be viewed with a critical lens.

If you have any further questions on how social media can present information to young people, or if you have any concerns on how this is impacting your son or daughter, please email me on the address below.