



CanCOVID Speaker Series

Event Summary



Evidence-Based Debunking: Needed and Effective

Speaker

Timothy Caulfield, LL.M., FRSC, FCAHS

Objective

To provide an overview of the Speaker Series presentation on 'Evidence-Based Debunking: Needed and Effective.' The aim of this talk was to present lessons from the work of #ScienceUpFirst – a social media initiative to limit the spread of misinformation related to COVID-19 through the promotion of vetted scientific content from a diverse group of voices.

Key Messages

- Debunking is effective against misinformation, including misinformation related to COVID-19. There is only a limited backfire effect if repeating misinformation while correcting it. There is extensive misinformation about COVID-19 in general and increasing misinformation related to the COVID-19 vaccines. This is largely playing out on social media, in particular social media in the United States. However, the flow of misinformation is extending into Canada.
- Every demographic is susceptible to misinformation. Studies have shown that factors that influence susceptibility to misinformation include health literacy, critical thinking, and lack of trust, resulting in a clustering of beliefs, such as around alternative medicine and misinformation. Individuals that believe in conspiracy theories are less likely to integrate new information into their thinking. This poses a challenge in countering misinformation.
- Strategies to debunk misinformation (from Professor Caulfield's slides):
 - Provide the science
 - Use clear and shareable content
 - Reference trustworthy and independent sources
 - If possible, note scientific consensus
 - Be nice, authentic, empathetic, and humble
 - Consider a narrative (emotion and humour)
 - Highlight gaps in knowledge and rhetorical tricks
 - Make facts the hook
 - Remember the general public is the audience

Next Steps

- While social media has allowed for more widespread sharing of credible public health information, it has also become a platform for the spread of misinformation. The use of evidence-based debunking strategies will be important in countering the spread of misinformation related to COVID-19. These strategies go beyond COVID-19 and have implications for addressing future 'infodemics.'

[Click here to view the recording of this event.](#)