Since January 2020 Elsevier has created a COVID-19 resource centre with free information in English and Mandarin on the novel coronavirus COVID-19. The COVID-19 resource centre is hosted on Elsevier Connect, the company's public news and information website.

Elsevier hereby grants permission to make all its COVID-19-related research that is available on the COVID-19 resource centre - including this research content - immediately available in PubMed Central and other publicly funded repositories, such as the WHO COVID database with rights for unrestricted research re-use and analyses in any form or by any means with acknowledgement of the original source. These permissions are granted for free by Elsevier for as long as the COVID-19 resource centre remains active.
Trusted writing in social media: FPM International Awards for Medical Writing in Social Media

The Fellowship of Postgraduate Medicine is partnering with its journals – Health Policy and Technology and the Postgraduate Medical Journal – to launch international awards for well-informed, clear writing on health matters in social media.

Patients, members of the public, health professionals and policymakers increasingly use social media as a source for health information and to guide important decisions on choices and actions about prevention and treatment of disease. Where the information is accurate and easy to follow, this can be very helpful. However, we are increasingly at the mercy of a spectrum of unreliability, from incomplete or inaccurate reports, to claims that inconvenient truths are ‘fake news’.

These are not new problems. Sinclair Lewis in his geopolitical satire of 1935 It Can’t Happen Here refers to fake news in the political domain [1]. George Orwell features unreliable reporting by government-controlled media in his dystopian 1984 [2]. However, the geographical reach and speed of spread of reports in current social media and present numerous ways to disseminate ‘alternative facts’ have new global implications for the consequences of unreliable ‘news’ [3].

Concerns in the health sector include social media posts making spurious health claims for ‘alternative medicines’ and containing misinformation about causes, severity and treatments of disease – from coronaviruses [4] and HIV infection [5] to cancers [6]. A striking example of the serious impact on the public of misinformation is a sustained large increase in vaccine hesitancy for measles and other immunisations since the late 1990s [7]. This arose from a later withdrawn report in the Lancet of a link between autism and immunisations against measles, mumps and rubella [8]. Although findings in the paper were judged to be fraudulent, anti-vaccine activists persist in providing misleading information on social media based on this report. Particularly worrying is how difficult it continues to be for international public health authorities to counter this vaccine hesitancy [7]. Immunisation rates against these potentially serious infections remain sub-optimal [7] 22 years after the original flawed report [8]. Social media undoubtedly plays a role here, and its potency is reflected in the fact that just one source is enough to disseminate and propagate untruths [9]. However, this very potency also represents a means to inform and educate patients, members of the public, health professionals and policymakers.

The FPM International Awards for Medical Writing in Social Media are new annual awards for medical or other health professional graduates from anywhere in the world. To be eligible, an article or blog must be in English and should have been published online between 1st August 2019 and the closing date for the awards: 31st July 2020. There will be up to 5 prizes per year. Each award winner will receive a £100 prize. Award winners will also have winning content published in one of the FPM’s journals, either Health Policy and Technology or the Postgraduate Medical Journal.

For more details and information about how to enter online, see the website for the FPM International Awards for Medical Writing in Social Media [10].

Declarations of interest

None.

Donald RJ Singer*

President, Fellowship of Postgraduate Medicine, 11 Chandos Street, London W1G 9EB, United Kingdom

Ken Redekop

Editor-in-Chief, Health Policy and Technology, School of Health Policy & Management, Erasmus University, Burg. Oudlaan 50 3062 PA Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Bernard Cheung

Editor-in-Chief, Postgraduate Medical Journal, Department of Medicine, University of Hong Kong, Queen Mary Hospital, Pokfulam, Hong Kong

*Corresponding author.

E-mail address: fpm.chandos@gmail.com (D.R. Singer)

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Website for FPM International Awards for Medical Writing in Social Media. https://thefpmuk.wordpress.com/2020/02/05/fpm-international-awards-for-medical-writing-in-social-media/