Youth-led efforts against infodemic

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Problem:
The IFMSA, voicing the opinion of 1.3 million medical students from 129 countries, acknowledges the importance of health literacy in driving social change. Today, there is a global epidemic of misinformation, spreading rapidly through social media platforms and other outlets, posing a critical threat for public health due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Also, it threatens the possibility of slowing down the progression of the virus. The fight against such misinformation requires continuous provision of the most reliable and recent information.

Description:
A global study was conducted by IFMSA, in collaboration with the WHO, composed of a survey to get data about all the organizations, institutions, NGOs, and other entities that focus on fact-checking and correcting misinformation about COVID-19. The survey was filled by medical students from end of April to end of May who reported name, type, scope of work, languages, primary funding source, type and source of information shared by the organization.

Results:
We discovered 182 initiatives from 62 countries worldwide that verified information in 48 languages. Social media, internet, radio, SMS, printed media and hearsay were identified as the main sources of misinformation. Video podcasts with experts, regular social media updates and newsletters, were described as best practices, in addition to debunking myths on a regular basis and verifying statements by public figures. Also quality of fact-checking differed between initiatives.

Lessons:
Data showed that myths and false information are spreading through different means from public figures to daily social media outlets. Fighting misinformation should use innovative and accessible approaches. There is urgent need for national initiatives and political engagement for myth-busting. IFMSA and WHO are following up by designing a platform to share fact-checking initiatives and recommendations openly, and by creating an AI system with Amazon to analyze articles in social media.

Key messages:
- Fact-checking and myth-busting are essential to limit the COVID-19 related infodemic spreading through different media and social media platforms, famous figures and others.
- Initiatives worldwide are doing fact-checking. Yet, the quality and quantity of available fact-checking differ between countries and there is a need for more universal good quality fact-checking.