

Trusted writing in social media: FPM International Awards for Medical Writing in Social Media

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The Fellowship of Postgraduate Medicine (FPM) 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 coronaviruses⁴ and HIV infection⁵ 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large increase in vaccine hesitancy for measles and other immunisations since the late 1990s.⁷ This arose from a later withdrawn report in the *Lancet* of a link between autism and immunisation against measles, mumps and rubella.⁸ Although findings in the report were judged to be fraudulent, antivaccine 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 measles remain suboptimal⁷ 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 graduates and other health professionals from anywhere in the world. To be eligible, an article or blog must be in English and should have been published online between 1 January 2019 and the closing date for the awards, 31 July 2020. There will be up to five 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

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