Dear Editor:

The Fact-Checking or verification of facts is a practice that consists of verifying if the information that circulates by different means, coincide or not, with the reality (1). Due to the rise of smartphones, digital platforms are rapidly emerging as means to which people turn in search of information; However, not everything found on the Internet is reliable, since there is fraudulent, misleading information, hate speech or manipulated information, the purpose of which is to distance the individual from reality, encompassing all this in the definition of misinformation or hoax (2), whose existence is maintained for very varied reasons, ranging from ideological interests to underlying economic benefits (3).

The topics most vulnerable to generating this type of content include politics, characters, immigration, racism, gender and science (3,4). Hoaxes can be spread by various means related to the digital world, but those spread by WhatsApp are more susceptible to going viral because they are taken as true when they come from people we know (3).

The Internet spreads freedom of information and expression; However, both are victims of generated content, in order to cause confusion and control public opinion; neither journalism as a profession, nor the social platforms for the dissemination of these messages have been able to control the flow of disinformation (2). In Latin America, Fact-Checking is less well known than in the United States and Europe (4), but everything indicates that both journalistic and civil initiatives to verify facts are multiplying (1), as examples we have Chequeado (Argentina), Chile Check and El Polígamo (Chile), Colombia Check and Detector de Líes (Colombia), Con Pruebas (Guatemala), El Sabueso (Mexico) and Cotejo (Venezuela), to name a few (5).

Although most of the misinformation generated has to do with the political sphere (4), health issues are not far behind; For example, in the Fact-Checking portal “Maldito Bulo”, in Spain, it has found and denied to date, 650 hoaxes in relation to COVID-19, which were disseminated by means such as Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook and pages of Internet (6), showing that these circulate more easily than official information and that it requires a greater effort to be denied, with which they can generate in the population, inappropriate practices to preserve their health.

Taking into account the above, it could be expected that there would be Fact-Checking initiatives made up of personnel who have a direct relationship with health sciences; However, most of these are made up of journalism professionals who consult specialists according to the subject in question (1,5), causing the process to generate a delayed response in contrast to false information that is widely disseminated in short time (2).

As an alternative solution, it is possible to train personnel related to health sciences in Fact-Checking, such as medical students belonging to scientific societies / associations, who not only have knowledge within the health sciences area, but also bases on research, avant-garde information disclosure and leadership, so that, in this way, rapid responses can be given to the viral dissemination of misinformation related to our area of knowledge.

In conclusion, training in Fact-Checking is necessary for medical students to respond in a timely manner, with verified information, to the large number of hoaxes that are generated daily, which would be helping to build healthy digital media that provide adequate information about practices that preserve health and prevent disease effectively.

Financial support: Self-financed.

Conflicts of interest: None.
REFERENCES


Corresponding author:

Paola Estefania Guerra Di Bonaventura
E-mail: paog.16@gmail.com
Phone: +584249745879

Received 19 april 2020
Accepted 12 july 2020