



ANA-Illinois Statement on Health Misinformation and Disinformation

Nurses have a professional and ethical responsibility to address health misinformation and disinformation and to minimize their harmful effects on patient care and public health. As one of the most trusted professions, nurses must lead in promoting evidence-informed practices, guiding communities toward credible health information, and countering misinformation with clarity, compassion, and integrity. Nurses possess both the expertise and opportunity to advocate for health literacy and to engage in digital and community outreach, ensuring individuals can make informed decisions that support their well-being.

ANA-Illinois asserts that addressing health misinformation is a matter of ethical and professional accountability. We affirm the public's right to accurate, evidence-informed health information and condemn any restriction of that access, especially when driven by political, ideological, or non-scientific agendas. As a professional nursing organization, we reject any effort that compromises the nurse's ability to advocate for truth, science, and the safety of those we serve.

Introduction

ANA-Illinois aligns with the American Nurses Association (ANA) in recognizing that health misinformation is a critical and urgent societal issue. In today's digital world, inaccurate health claims are amplified through social media, online forums, and messaging platforms, often reaching people faster than evidence-based information. This undermines trust in healthcare providers, fuels doubt about scientific advances, and leads to decisions that may harm individuals and communities.

Understanding how health misinformation spreads—and fostering health literacy to counter it—are vital steps in building a healthier, better-informed society. ANA-Illinois encourages nurses to take an active role in confronting falsehoods, promoting critical thinking, and serving as reliable voices in both clinical and public spheres.

Recognizing the Spectrum of Perspectives

Nurses serve individuals across a broad continuum of health needs. This includes:

- **Recipients of care:** Those receiving any form of healthcare, including patients, clients, and community members—particularly individuals who are undocumented, unhoused, or underinsured.

- **Clinicians and health providers:** Licensed professionals providing direct care, such as nurses, advanced practice nurses, physicians, and other healthcare workers.
- **Allied and unlicensed professionals:** Health educators, community workers, caregivers, and others who support health promotion and patient education.

Key Definitions

- *Misinformation:* Incorrect or incomplete information shared without malicious intent.
- *Disinformation:* Deliberately false or misleading information used to advance a specific agenda.
- *Malinformation:* Accurate information taken out of context to cause harm or mislead.
- *Infodemiology:* The study of the distribution and impact of information in digital environments, especially in public health.
- *Health literacy:* The capacity to access, comprehend, and apply health information to make sound health decisions.
- *eHealth literacy:* The ability to locate and use online health information effectively.
- *Digital literacy:* The skills to navigate digital platforms, critically assess content, and avoid misinformation.

Ethical Foundations in Nursing Practice

The *Code of Ethics for Nurses* from ANA provides the foundation for ethical responses to misinformation:

- **Provision 3:** Nurses advocate for the rights, health, and safety of patients. Combating misinformation supports safe, ethical care.
- **Provision 4:** Nurses are accountable for evidence-informed practice. Addressing misinformation upholds this responsibility.
- **Provision 7:** Nurses engage in knowledge generation and community health. Combating misinformation advances public education and social good.
- **Provision 9:** Nurses and nursing organizations are stewards of social justice and human flourishing. Promoting truthful health communication is central to this mission.

- **Provision 10:** Nurses engage globally to promote health equity and environmental well-being. Misinformation is a global challenge requiring collective advocacy.

Nurses have a duty to prioritize patient well-being, grounded in facts, not personal beliefs. Upholding scientific truth is a cornerstone of professional nursing practice.

Professional Organizational Support

National and global healthcare bodies support efforts to combat health misinformation:

- American Psychological Association (2023): *Using Psychological Science to Understand and Fight Health Misinformation*.
- U.S. Surgeon General (2021): *Confronting Health Misinformation*.
- National Council of State Boards of Nursing: *Policy on Dissemination of Non-scientific and Misleading COVID-19 Information by Nurses*.

Practice-Based Scenarios

To guide practical applications, ANA-Illinois highlights the following real-world scenarios with corresponding knowledge, skills, and attitudes for addressing misinformation across settings:

1. **Community Health** – Addressing herbal remedy use influenced by social media in asthma care.
2. **Emergency Department** – Correcting harmful misconceptions about life-saving cardiac procedures.
3. **Pediatric Care** – Supporting vaccine-hesitant parents with evidence and empathy.

Each scenario underscores the need for trust-building, clear communication, and cultural sensitivity.

Resources for Nurses and the Public

A comprehensive list of training tools, toolkits, games, and multimedia resources is available to support health professionals in understanding and addressing misinformation. These include:

- Health Misinformation Toolkit from HHS
- Surgeon General's Advisory on Health Misinformation
- Cranky Uncle Game for understanding misinformation tactics
- Misinformation Rx from multiple U.S. universities

Conclusion

Nurses must lead efforts to stop the spread of misinformation and disinformation. Through education, advocacy, and ethical practice, we uphold our commitment to the health and safety of individuals, families, and communities. ANA-Illinois calls on all nurses to be vigilant, proactive, and courageous in speaking truth and promoting health literacy.

*Adopted by
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This statement was adapted with permission from the Minnesota Organization of Registered Nurses (MNORN).