



ABSTRACT

Covid-19, nutrition and pseudoscientific claims

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Pseudoscience consists of statements, beliefs, or practices that claim to be both scientific and factual but are incompatible with the scientific method. Pseudoscience is often characterized by contradictory, exaggerated or unfalsifiable claims; reliance on confirmation bias rather than rigorous attempts at refutation; lack of openness to evaluation by other experts; absence of systematic practices when developing hypotheses; and continued adherence long after the pseudoscientific hypotheses have been experimentally discredited. The term “infodemic” combines the terms “information” and “epidemic” and refers to an excess of information (both true and false) that makes it difficult for people to access reliable sources and obtain valid guidance when it becomes most necessary for decision-making. Inaccurate information spreads widely and at speed, making it more difficult for the public to identify verified facts and advice from trusted sources, such as their local health authority or WHO.

Hot and debatable issues like the ones triggered by the novel COVID-19 provide a fertile ground for pseudoscience and conspiracy theories to proliferate. The natural course of the COVID-19 infection, in which most of the patients survive, makes it a desirable playground for the promoters of pseudoscience because they can attribute the natural recovery of such patients – or escaping the infection by others – to their pseudo-treatments. Pseudoscientific information about COVID-19 is detrimental to disease survival, increased co-morbidity and psychological well-being. There is some evidence that alternative treatments and placebo effects can relieve distress — a common justification for tolerating unproven alternative treatments. But it’s inappropriate to deceive people (even for their benefit) with magical thinking, and it is inappropriate for scientists to let such misinformation go unremarked.

The COVID-19 infodemic is full of false claims, half backed conspiracy theories and pseudoscientific therapies, regarding the diagnosis, treatment, prevention, origin and spread of the virus.

Correcting misrepresentations should be viewed as a professional responsibility.

Keywords: pseudoscientific claims, COVID-19, Nutrition, infodemic

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