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Perspective

Skin Deep: Peeling Back the Layers of Dermatology Misinformation on Social Media

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INTRODUCTION

Sunscreen contouring where individuals apply sunscreen to selective areas of their face to achieve a more sculpted looked. This was a dermatological trend doing rounds on major social media platforms. The supposed benefits of a more defined facial structure were plastered across the screen for all to see. However, the dangers such as increased risk of sun burns and skin cancer, due to large portions of the skin being left unprotected, were seldom mentioned. Social media is becoming a major player when it comes to seeking health information. Over 80 percent of people report going to social media when they have queries regarding their condition. As such is it vital for information on the platform to be accurate and evidence based. This article will explore how misinformation is spread across social media platforms, its potential consequences and proposed solutions within the field of dermatology.

DESCRIPTION

Misinformation in dermatology is prevalent across various social media platforms. Videos are created on a variety of topics such as DIY skin care treatments, miracle cures, false claims about skincare products and misinformation about a number of skin diseases. One study in particular found that of the information regarding psoriasis on TikTok, 55% of it was deemed unreliable. Key producers of misinformation on TikTok include patients, health/wellness gurus and skincare companies/brands. Furthermore, social media platforms themselves have a role in the propagation of misinformation as their algorithm is designed to promote videos based on engagement rather than accuracy. This means over the top claims and outlandish ideas are more likely to be presented to users rather than evidence based sensical information.

The ramifications of dermatological misinformation on social media platforms is significant. It could result in worsening of one's skin conditions, allergic reactions and delayed presentation to healthcare, ultimately resulting in poorer outcomes for patients. Misinformation on social medial can also alter the public perception of dermatological treatments with patients preferring trendy but unproven methods rather than established medical solutions. Finally, conflicting views between content creators on social media and qualified dermatologists can result in an erosion of trust in the medical profession with individuals favoring their preferred influencer rather than medically qualified professionals.

As mentioned previously, one example of harmful misinformation of social media was the sunscreen contouring trend. Another equally harmful trend was the emergence of at-home chemical peels using high concentrations of acid. These products promise brighter and smoother skin. However, just like the previous example, dangers such as severe burns, scarring and permanent skin damage seemed to be neglected.

In order to combat the spread of misinformation on social media platforms here are a number of proposed solutions. Firstly, medical professionals should advocate for greater moderation of content and improved features to identify and flag false information. Furthermore, there needs to be greater public education campaigns to make patients aware of the dangers of following unverified health advice on social media. Finally, certified dermatologists can play a role by engaging more with social media and potentially creating evidence-based content to counteract information.

CONCLUSION

To conclude dermatological misinformation on social media has the potential to cause serious harm to patients. The consequences can range from simply ineffective treatment to more serious outcomes such a worsening of a skin condition and even permanent skin damage. By greater moderation, public education campaigns and greater engagement by dermatologists on social media it is our hope that social media becomes a safer place for both sharing and consuming healthcare information.

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