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Debunking myths and misbeliefs in medicine: educating patients to take evidence-based health choices

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Background & Aim: for centuries the field of medicine has been filled with myths shared between doctors and patients, mostly due to lack of knowledge.

With time a better understanding of physiology and biochemistry about how the body and diseases work put a huge gap between the two groups, therefore facilitating the opportunities for quacks to spread misunderstandings and false information.

With the digital era and especially after the exponential growth of social media, although an easier access to medical information, health-related myths instead of disappearing kept spreading among the public.

Because of movements (ex. anti vaccination/ vegan movements) very active on the web with blogs, dedicated websites or through groups on social networks, myths managed to get more visibility than facts, despite being based on clearly wrong and non-scientific bases or on conspirational theories.

People who believe in these kind of myths can make health-related choices that could expose them and/or the community to different levels of danger.

The role of the GP is therefore crucial in educating the patient to distinguish myths from facts using reliable online sources.

Method: After handing participants a survey to investigate which myths are common across their Country, a presentation will show what kind of, how and why common misbeliefs can spread among the population. Then participants will be split in groups to debunk some common articles that could be found on the web by patients; after sharing their results, tools and effective methods to engage patients in recognising reliable sources will be presented and discussed.

Results: Participants will learn how to address the most common myths in medicine and what their impact is. They will also learn and discuss new strategies to change patients attitude toward non-evidence-based practices.