WHO competency framework

Building a response workforce to manage infodemics

World Health Organization

infodemic MANAGEMENT

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Foreword by Dr Sylvie Briand

Director of the WHO Department of Global Infectious Hazard Preparedness

An "infodemic", being the overabundance of information – some accurate and some not – that occurs during an epidemic, represents a major problem. It makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and guidance on what to think and on how to behave during a health emergency. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this is exacerbated by the global scale of the emergency and by the globally interconnected ways in which information is spread through online and offline communication channels.

We have witnessed several negative consequences of an infodemic: confusion and fear (especially among populations that are vulnerable and at risk), loss of trust in institutions, misconceptions, misunderstanding and stigma. All this can result in individuals not engaging in appropriate decision-making that, in the context of a pandemic, might lead to disease and death.

WHO has promoted a major effort on how to manage the infodemic, calling upon the knowledge and expertise of practitioners and scientists working in the field. Infodemiology has emerged as a valuable discipline now and for the future. Considerable work has been carried out to understand the multidisciplinary nature of infodemic management, as well as to identify key examples and tools to highlight, measure and better managed instances of infodemics. A choral effort was essential to build a public health research agenda to direct focus and investment on infodemic management globally.

The development of a competency framework to manage infodemic is a main step towards the measurement of Infodemic management through a detailed definition of the different fields involved in infodemic management, and the requisite knowledge, skills and abilities needed for the workforce to prepare for and respond to infodemics. It is a matter of listening better to communities, of targeting persuasive instances of communication and evaluating their effects through approaches. It is also a matter of training and educating of strengthening health literacy and critical thinking, of collaborating and networking. Moreover, standard operating procedures need to be implemented in health institutions so that they are prepared to act and react in a timely and coordinated way.

Reliable and trustworthy information is among the key determinants of our knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and ultimately behaviour.

Infodemic cannot be suppressed, it can only be managed. Hence, the importance of health authority is to embrace actively the new field of epidemic and pandemic preparedness and response. It strengthens the relevance of institutional communication and promotes the coordination and consistency of health information.

Reliable and trustworthy information is among the key determinants of our knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and ultimately behaviour. Especially when phenomena are unknown, different opinions spread around. It is difficult to standardize a normativity of what is right or wrong, or of quality versus manipulation. Yet, managing infodemics and health misinformation means that health institutions must be able to "talk" to, exchange with and respond to their communities but the trust is crucial for response. This dialogue is crucial to avoid the burdens of uncertainties resulting in unfruitful relativism. This is why a competency framework for infodemic management is an asset for health institutions today, and a guiding compass to orient a large part of their goals and missions.

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
EPI-WIN	WHO Information Network for Epidemics
IM	Infodemic management
US CDC	US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
WHO	World Health Organization

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