

Australian Medical Association Limited

ABN 37 008 426 793

42 Macquarie Street, Barton ACT 2600: PO Box 6090, Kingston ACT 2604
 Telephone: (02) 6270 5400 Facsimile (02) 6270 5499
 Website : <http://www.ama.com.au/>



Transcript:

Chairman of Ethics and Medico-Legal Committee, AMA SA President, Dr Chris Moy, with Stephen Quartermain and Kate Stevenson on 3AW, Tuesday 9 July 2019

Subjects: Online medical advice

STEPHEN QUARTERMAIN: Australians are being warned not to trust dodgy medical advice from Facebook and YouTube as a former cancer patient has declared bad advice almost killed him. Dr Chris Moy, Chairman of the Australian Medical Association's Ethics and Medico-legal Committee, joins us on 3AW Breakfast. Good morning, Chris.

CHRIS MOY: Good morning to you.

STEPHEN QUARTERMAIN: Well, it sounds fairly obvious that you shouldn't rely on advice from Facebook and YouTube, but I guess in these modern times a lot of people go there to seek some advice.

CHRIS MOY: Look, the bottom line is it is extremely seductive sometimes because sometimes you'll be given sort of easier options or what appears to be sort of simple options than your doctor is prescribing. But the bottom line is that people need to open their eyes. We're talking about the Wild West there, there are no checks and balances, no accountability and even worse, even though sometimes people are giving sort of well-meaning advice, it's likely people are getting something out of it, either popularity or they're actually getting some monetary sort of advantage out of it. It is actually pretty scary what can happen and so we're just asking people to open their eyes and go to see their doctor where they're protected.

KATE STEVENSON: Chris, this case in *The Australian* today talks about a young man who had leukaemia and he took something called super vitamins after falling for someone's spiel on Facebook. Is the danger- can they actually be dangerous or is it just the idea that they might do nothing for you?

CHRIS MOY: Well, I think it's exactly the sort of two aspects of it. Firstly, there is quite often the options that are presented may seem just easier or natural or, you know, common sense. But the problem is that sometimes these natural therapies can actually have side effects just as, you know, much as medications that your doctor might give you.

But the other thing is that it's often the delay in treatment. For example, you might have a symptom and go: oh well, this seems simple, I'll just - I'll take the advice of Facebook and it turns out that this treatment actually delays you seeing a doctor, which actually means that there's a delay in treatment and it could be something as bad as picking up the cancer. And that may make the difference.

STEPHEN QUARTERMAIN: How much pressure do committees like yours put on social media to perhaps be more careful or more heavily monitored when it comes to these sorts of issues?

CHRIS MOY: We can't really. We're not in a position to. Our job is to actually try and maintain the standards. Look, the main thing is that when you're seeing a doctor, you're

protected by something, and something that is really important, and it's the doctor-patient relationship where there's trust.

You know that I'm supposed to be doing what's best for you, there's privacy and there's this thing called the Code of Ethics and Professional Standards. Now, they're not sexy but they also mean that sometimes I'm going to give you bad news. For example, you come in and I say the best treatment for you is go home and get some rest. Whereas, you get on Facebook and see that you just take this simple thing but, in fact, that actually made it worse for you or actually may delay treatment and cause trouble for you later.

So you know, unfortunately, we can't - we have to actually just protect our side of things and make sure we do our job and then try and explain to the community the difference between that.

STEPHEN QUARTERMAIN: Educate. Yeah.

CHRIS MOY: Yes.

KATE STEVENSON: But Chris, we do know though, you know, when we hear radio ads and we see ads on TV and they're for health products, we do see disclaimers at the end. Obviously, sort of broadcast mediums have to do that. Is there no regulation at all online?

CHRIS MOY: Well, I think it goes the other way. There's regulations, for example, there's the Therapeutic Goods Administration, the TGA, for example, which actually regulates medications and treatments to make sure that they are actually safe, for example. And that may be - there's a positive sort of protection but it's actually quite hard to go the other way and that's in the realm of Consumer Affairs.

But look, we're talking about a tidal wave of really, frankly, cowboy-type advice out there, which again is often well-meaning, you know, it sounds great but the reality is that it's not based - you've got no recourse if it falls through and it turns out that either it doesn't work or actually it causes more problems or actually threatens your health.

STEPHEN QUARTERMAIN: Chris, thank you. Chairman of the Australian Medical Association's Ethics and Medico-legal Committee, Chris Moy.

9 July 2019

CONTACT: John Flannery 02 6270 5477 / 0419 494 761

Follow the AMA Media on Twitter: http://twitter.com/ama_media

Follow the AMA President on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/amapresident>

Follow *Australian Medicine* on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/amaausmed>

Like the AMA on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/AustralianMedicalAssociation>