

EVALUATING WHETHER OR NOT TO TRUST MENTAL HEALTH INFORMATION ON THE INTERNET

There is so much information on the internet, sometimes it's hard to tell the good stuff from the bad. When looking up information online, know your ABCs:

AUTHORITY

The article should be written with a level of *authority*. Ask yourself:

- Who wrote the article?
- Does that person have any expertise in mental health?
- Was the article reviewed by a mental health expert?

Health content should be written by people with professional expertise, or at least reviewed by health care professionals for accuracy. No matter what, it should be obvious who wrote the article and what the qualifications of the author are.

BUSINESS MODEL

The *business model* of a website can bias its content.

You should be able to easily figure out who sponsors the web site. This is important because it helps you figure out the motives behind the site – is it there to support a charity? To try to sell you something? Also try to figure out if the site has an advisory board of qualified people (professionals and consumers). You can often find information about sponsorship and advisory boards in the “about us” section of a website.

The web address (URL) can also provide useful information about the business model of a website:

- .gov = government agency
- .edu = educational institution
- .org = non-profit or research organization
- .com = company or for-profit organization

CURRENT

Articles about mental health should be *current*. Ask yourself:

- When was the article written?
- Has it ever been updated?

Health websites should be updated often because new information is constantly being gathered about conditions and their treatments. The date of the latest revision or update should be clearly posted – you can usually find it at the bottom of the page.

SOURCES

A well-written article should identify its *sources* of information.

Ask yourself:

- What is the original source of the information you are reading?
- Is it clearly documented?

All information and claims should be supported by clearly marked scientific references. Full citations or even links to these references should be available within the article.

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