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Beware of Health Advice on Social Media

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By Tracy Rippon

Recently, my 23-year-old son came to me with a concern from his girlfriend about birth control. First, I was incredibly happy that he came to me for advice. Although I was not surprised, I am also a health care provider and have always been up front with health-related education and advice for my children. Second, I was furious when I found out what he had to share. After seeing a post on a social media video feed, his girlfriend believed that her method of birth control could cause cancer. I reassured him that there is absolutely no evidence that hormonal methods of birth control cause cancer. The hormones in birth control methods (mostly progesterone and sometimes estrogen), are the same hormones produced during pregnancy. In fact, hormone levels in birth control are much less than they would be in pregnancy.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics and recent research evaluating social media sites, over 80% of health-related posts have misleading or inaccurate information. Some of this is politically motivated. Social media influencers are actively pushing conservative narratives against birth control even though most voters oppose laws that would restrict access to birth control. Frank conversations need to be had with our youth. They need to be made aware that they are being misinformed and manipulated if they trust health advice on social media sites. Considering the anti-abortion laws in place, the consequences of misinformation that sow distrust in birth control methods can be life-changing. Spread the word and help inform our youth. Having open conversations about reproductive healthcare has never been more important.

As for getting answers to questions about reproductive health care, healthcare providers are good places to start with general questions. Most have a nurse to take calls, telehealth, or messaging capability. For youth who truly want to stay anonymous, the CDC is still a good resource. Recent efforts to erode trust in the CDC have not been successful. Professional medical organizations support the CDC and do not condone any political actions to sow mistrust. As always, Planned Parenthood is an evidence-based option, and the bulk of services they provide relate to routine healthcare, not abortion (also politicized). In a state where abortion is restricted, our youth need reliable information about their options for birth control.

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