healthimpactnews.com

The website for Health Impact News, a network of health sites that publishes false content, including claims that drinking a bleach-like solution can cure autism.

Ownership and Financing

Health Impact News is owned by its founder and managing editor, Brian Shihavy, through Sophia Media LLC, a privately owned, Texas-based company.

Health Impact News shares content with four associated domains, including Medicalnimpact.com, Vaccineimpact.com, CoconutOil.com, and Created4Health.org.

The sites run advertisements, which often market products such as coconut oil that are sold through the Shihavy-owned website HealthyTraditions.com.

Content

Health Impact News’ motto, which appears across the top of the homepage, is “News that Impacts Your Health that Other Media Sources May Censor!”

Articles frequently tout alternative health treatments, especially coconut oil. Stories are often critical of vaccinations, pharmaceutical companies, and the healthcare industry. Typical headlines on the site include “Vaccines are Religion, not Science” and “The Historical Facts on Measles and the Measles Vaccine Censored by Mainstream Media.”

Content is divided into sections that include Alternative Health, Medicine Watch, Real Food Nutrition, and Sustainable Agriculture.

HealthImpactNews.com also republishes content from its four associated domains in specific sections. For example, the site’s Created4Health section, which publishes religious-themed stories on medicine and creationism, features content that also appears on Created4Health.org.

Credibility

Stories written by the Health Impact News network staff often consist of authors’ commentary on medical research and U.S. government reports. The sites also republish content sites that NewsGuard has found to have repeatedly published false content, such as ChildrensHealthDefense.org, Mercola.com, and NeOnNettle.com.

In January 2020, Health Impact News promoted false and unsubstantiated claims about the coronavirus outbreak. For example, an article titled “Did Bill Gates & World Economic Forum Predict Coronavirus Outbreak? Will There be an Internet Blackout to Control Information?” tied the Microsoft co-founder to the outbreak, implying that he was somehow responsible for it. The article said, “not only did the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation participate in and help set up the pandemic simulation of a coronavirus outbreak, but they just so happen to fund the group who owns the patent to the deadly coronavirus and are already working on a vaccine to solve the current crisis.”

The Gates Foundation did participate in a simulated emergency preparedness exercise in October 2019, but according to FactCheck.org, the exercise involved a mock coronavirus with different features than the real coronavirus.

“For the scenario, we modeled a fictional coronavirus pandemic, but we explicitly stated that it was not a prediction. Instead, the exercise served to highlight preparedness and response challenges that would likely arise in a very severe pandemic,” the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, which hosted the October 2019 exercise, said in a January 2020 statement.

Another January 2020 article, titled “Vitamin C Protects Against Coronavirus,” stated, “The coronavirus pandemic can be dramatically slowed, or stopped, with the immediate widespread use of high doses of vitamin C.”

There is no evidence to support the claim that high doses of vitamin C can prevent or treat coronavirus. According to both the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization, there is no specific treatment recommended for the strain of coronavirus in the 2020 outbreak.

Shihavy, Health Impact News’ managing editor and founder, did not respond to a January 2020 email from NewsGuard seeking comment on the site’s false and unsubstantiated claims related to the coronavirus outbreak.
A July 2019 article about the CD protocol claimed it has cured hundreds of autism cases. "If 557 people have already lost their autistic diagnosis through the use of the CD protocol, then how many more must be set free from this modern illness before the scientific and medical communities will wake up and recognize the truth that autism can be treated and cured," the article said.

Both articles cited claims made by Keni Rivera, a former real estate agent and parent of an autistic child, who has written books touting the protocol. Rivera has claimed without evidence that more than 550 people are no longer autistic after using the chemical solution.

Since 2010, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has issued multiple warnings about the CD protocol. In an August 2019 warning, the FDA said it is "not aware of any research showing that these products are safe or effective for treating any illness" and warned that consuming the solution "is the same as drinking bleach." Drinking the solution may cause "severe vomiting, severe diarrhea, life-threatening low blood pressure caused by dehydration, and acute liver failure," the agency said.

Stories in HealthImpactNews.com's Coconut Health section and on the affiliated website CoconutOil.com have published unsubstantiated claims about coconut oil's supposed health benefits. For example, a January 2019 article headlined "Research Shows High-Fat Low-Carb Diet with Coconut Oil Can Prevent or Cure Alzheimer’s" overstated the results of a study published by the journal Nutrition in October 2018.

The study concluded that "the ketogenic diet could be an effective treatment and prevention for Alzheimer’s disease." However, it did not refer to any diet that includes coconut oil as a "cure" for Alzheimer’s.

Authoritative sources, such as the Alzheimer's Society U.K. and Alzheimer's Society Canada, have stated that there is no reliable evidence supporting claims that coconut oil can prevent or cure Alzheimer’s. Organizations such as the World Health Organization and the U.K. National Health Service have also warned that consuming too much coconut oil may raise cholesterol levels due to its high amounts of saturated fat.

In an August 2019 email to NewsGuard, Shilhavy defended the articles that promoted the CD protocol and coconut oil, based on anecdotal evidence from people who have said those treatments helped them, and questioned NewsGuard’s determination that the claims were false.

"Is NewsGuard simply representing the belief published by corporate media organizations that these claims are false, or are you investigating the claims yourself to see what evidence is presented before declaring that thousands of people making claims for how a product helped them are false?" Shilhavy asked.

Health Impact News has repeatedly promoted false claims about vaccines, including the debunked claim that the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine can cause autism. For example, a November 2018 story about a measles outbreak in Rockland County, New York, stated that "there is no doubt that many have linked the vaccine to causing autism."

The CDC has stated repeatedly that there is "no link between vaccines and autism" — a conclusion backed by an abundance of scientific evidence.

A March 2019 article claimed that vaccinations may have exacerbated New York's measles outbreak, saying, "Given the fact that the MMR vaccine is a live virus vaccine where the vaccinated individual can be contagious for up to 30 days, could the mass vaccination campaign be a contributing factor in the measles outbreaks?"

According to the CDC, the MMR vaccine does contain a live, but weakened, version of the measles virus, which is necessary in order for a person to develop immunity. A 2016 review of existing scientific literature published in the journal Vaccine found that "no evidence of human-to-human transmission of the measles virus vaccine has been reported."

In addition, data provided by the Rockland County Health Department shows that more than 78 percent of the confirmed measles cases in its 2019 outbreak involved unvaccinated individuals, contradicting the article's claim that vaccinations contributed to the outbreak.

In an exchange of emails with NewsGuard, Shilhavy defended the site's coverage of vaccines. "The narrative often published in corporate-sponsored media sites is that 'the science is settled' regarding vaccines," he said. "You are a journalist, so let me ask you: Have you ever interviewed scientists or other medical professionals who would make such a statement regarding any other topic besides vaccines where 'the science is settled'? Is this a factual statement, or is it false? New vaccines are being developed all the time and entering the market, and is the public to understand that the science for all vaccines is settled?"

Health Impact News has made claims about so-called "medical kidnappings" based on social media posts. HealthImpactNews.com's Medicine Watch section and the affiliated site MedicalKidnap.com frequently post stories about the incidents, in which children are legally removed from parents' custody after signs of neglect or abuse are reported by health care professionals.

For example, a May 2019 article claimed a pregnant woman was "forcibly drugged" and given a cesarean section without her consent at a Connecticut hospital, where she alleges the staff called her husband a "Muslim terrorist" and had her baby taken away by the state's child protective services. The article cited only Facebook posts supposedly written by the mother and father, along with a GoFundMe page raising money for their legal fees. At the end of the story, a disclaimer said Health Impact
News “has had no contact with the family” and has “not received any communication so far from the hospital in question, nor the social services agencies, to get their comments.”

Despite this example, Shihavy denied to NewsGuard that his sites have ever based its “medical kidnapping” stories on social media posts. The Connecticut story, he said, was “thoroughly vetted” after the site was contacted by a friend of the couple in the story. He said that after reading the GoFundMe page, he “looked up every single person that was named in the text, from hospital workers to social workers, etc., and verified that all of them were employed where they claimed.”

NewsGuard found that the GoFundMe page used only first names such as “nurse named Sarah” or “Marie, our case worker’s supervisor.”

Asked about the story’s disclaimer, Shihavy said, “The reason we stated that ‘Health Impact News has had no contact with the family,’ as we have done frequently with other stories where court proceedings have already started, is because frequently judges in these family court cases gag the parents (unconstitutionally) and try to coerce them to get us to take our stories down.”

Because Health Impact News and its related sites have published articles and headlines that make false health claims, promoting unproven cures for diseases, NewsGuard has determined that the network repeatedly publishes false content, fails to gather and present information responsibly, and publishes deceptive headlines.

Health Impact News does not articulate a corrections policy, and does not regularly publish corrections. NewsGuard could only find one published correction, from 2013. When asked for examples, Shihavy pointed to an August 2019 article that corrected the time of a court hearing.

“Corrections to simple factual errors, such as the spelling of someone’s name, etc. are simply corrected,” he said. The site has not corrected many significant errors and false claims in its articles, which is why NewsGuard has determined that the site does not have effective corrections practices.

The About Us page on HealthImpactNews.com discloses the site’s editorial stance on its most frequently covered topics, including vaccines, alternative health remedies, and coconut oil. Thus, although the articles frequently include writers’ opinions advancing these disclosed perspectives, NewsGuard has determined that Health Impact News handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

**Transparency**

HealthImpactNews.com discloses in its About Us section that it is “published by Sophia Media” and identifies Shihavy as its managing editor, founder, and owner.

Shihavy is also identified as the founder of Tropical Traditions, a company he describes as the start of the “modern day Coconut Oil Revolution.”

However, articles written by Shihavy that make unsubstantiated health claims about coconut oil do not disclose that he sells the oil on the HealthyTraditions.com website. Stories on HealthImpactNews.com and its associated sites also frequently promote products sold through Healthy Traditions. For example, stories in HealthImpactNews.com’s Coconut Health section and on CoconutOil.com include links to buy items such as two gallons of coconut oil for $50, or a $10 eBook authored by Shihavy.

Shihavy claimed to NewsGuard that he cannot disclose within articles that he sells coconut oil on a separate site because “FDA law prevents me from doing so if there is a health benefit claimed.” He linked to a March 2009 warning letter that one of his sites, TropicalTraditions.com, received from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration about making unproven health claims for products, including coconut oil. Shihavy said that he did not agree with the agency’s decision.

“We had to hire a regulatory attorney to help us comply with their request, because we did not have the millions of dollars required to apply to the FDA to get coconut oil approved as a ‘drug,’ and to our knowledge the FDA has never approved any product that is not patented and where the company spending the resources needed to get FDA approval could recoup their investment via their patented product,” Shihavy told NewsGuard. “We also did not have the resources to fight the FDA in court under constitutional violations regarding freedom of speech under the First Amendment, so we complied, by removing all links to peer reviewed literature, testimonials, etc. that backed up the health claims to a separate website (coconutoil.com) where we do not sell coconut oil.”

HealthImpactNews.com articles are generally attributed to authors, and their biographies are provided on the About Us page. A Contact Us page provides a general contact form for messaging the site.

**History**

Shihavy began publishing health information online in 2000 on the site Coconut-Info.com, according to the About Us page on CoconutOil.com, which was registered in 2011.

HealthImpactNews.com was registered that same year.

*Editor’s Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on Feb. 3, 2020, with new content on the site related to the coronavirus outbreak.*

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