

CAN YOU SPOT MISLEADING NEWS?

In the article “Be a Science Fact-Checker,” you learned that news articles are sometimes misleading. If inaccurate news spreads, it can have serious consequences.

For example, in 1980, a paragraph written by two researchers appeared in the letter to the editor section of a scientific journal. The scientists presented data about how often

addiction developed in patients who had been given opioid drugs in the hospital. Opioids are powerful pain medications that are highly addictive. But according to the letter, few hospital patients developed addiction.

The letter has frequently been cited in other articles as evidence that opioids are not addictive. But it is now known that this conclusion was

misleading. Drug companies that make opioid medications used the letter to persuade doctors that the drugs had a very low risk of addiction. In the following years, the number of opioid prescriptions increased dramatically. This inaccurate interpretation has contributed to the growing misuse of the drugs and has led to a deadly overdose crisis.

ACTIVITY

DIRECTIONS: In this activity, you'll use the tools you learned in “Be a Science Fact-Checker” to critically analyze a misleading news article about the letter described above. Read the article “Drugs Don’t Cause Addiction” (at right) and identify ways in which it is misleading. Then answer the questions below on a separate piece of paper.

QUESTIONS

1. How is this article misleading?

Use the five critical-reading questions from the article “Be a Science Fact-Checker” to analyze the article. What is inaccurate or misleading in this article? Describe at least two factors that support your argument.

2. What evidence is missing? The article contains other clues that the claim that opioids are not addictive is not backed by sufficient evidence. Think critically about how the study was conducted. Did the scientists collect all of the relevant data to support the conclusion? Describe at least one limitation of the study. Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.

