

CAN YOU SPOT MISLEADING NEWS?

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

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

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

The letter has been cited in many articles. It has been used as evidence that opioids are not addictive. But it is now known that

this conclusion was misleading. Drug companies that make opioids used the letter to convince doctors that the drugs had a very low risk of addiction. In the following years, the number of opioid prescriptions increased dramatically. This misleading interpretation has led to the growing misuse of opioids. It has also 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 analyze a misleading news article about the letter described above. Read the article “Drugs Don’t Cause Addiction” (at right). 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?

As you read, use the five critical-reading questions from the article “Be a Science Fact-Checker” to guide you. What information is misleading in this article? Give reasons to support your answer.

2. What evidence is missing?

In the article, 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 enough data to support the conclusion? Describe one limitation of the study. Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.

