

# VETFLASH!

Dear SAVA Member,

Where science and emotion meet, it is unfortunately quite often that emotion wins arguments. You have been inundated by emails, WhatsApp messages and conversations delivered by individuals that claim to have some expertise in the Covid-19 pandemic. Videos are spread with official-looking logos, that have just enough facts in it to make one trust the remaining content.

In an article published by Science in 2018 (<https://science.sciencemag.org/content/359/6380/1094>) the authors define fake news as “fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent”.

Psychology Today published this (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/choice-matters/202003/seeking-information-in-time-uncertainty>) on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 2020. The authors highlight the fact that false news spreads much faster and wider than real news.

Indeed, a large-scale study (<https://science.sciencemag.org/content/359/6380/1146>) that examined a vast data set of over 126,000 stories, tweeted and retweeted on Twitter from 2006 – 2017 by some 3,000,000 unique users found that false stories were consistently propagated more widely, deeply, and quickly than true stories. For example, false stories spread to as many as 100,000 people and were retweeted by more unique users while true stories rarely reached more than 1000 people and took longer to do so.

In short, it appears that fake news reaches 100 times *more* people than true stories do.

Fake news is created with the intention to deceive. This person will not invent fake news that leaves everyone indifferent or that concerns a subject that doesn't interest anyone. Furthermore, it's easy to fall into the trap of fake news, because it is often very well executed. We tend to trust our family, our friends, people we admire (stars, bloggers, etc.). If these people share something on social media, we will tend to believe them more easily. People who produce fake news use a fool proof trick, highly prized in advertising: they play on our emotions. They know that, motivated by a strong emotion (surprise, fear, disgust, hatred, contempt, etc.), people are more likely to react and share information

Where does this leave you?

1. Stick to trusted scientific resources. Herewith some resources that can be deemed trustworthy:
  - a. The Lancet: <https://www.thelancet.com/coronavirus>
  - b. Elsevier: <https://www.elsevier.com/connect/coronavirus-information-center>
  - c. World Health Organisation: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/global-research-on-novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov>
2. If you receive something, check, check and check again. Some tricks to verify would include typing as much detail in a web search as possible. For example, a very official looking video started circulating a few days ago where hot air and using a blow dryer to dry sinuses started circulating. By typing in “hair dryer hot air covid”, the first article is this: (<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/hair-dryer-coronavirus>). A further trick is purely applying common sense – as a person trained in science you are much better equipped than most to identify fake news quickly.
3. If you have identified an item sent to you as fake news, do not hesitate to identify that to the sender or the group to which it was posted. This will likely involve any further spreading of fake news that may have disastrous consequences through the actions of gullible individuals.

**We have been inundated by members requesting information and updates. We will attempt to limit the number of emails that we send. When you receive a VetFlash from SAVA, accept that we have deemed it relevant and urgent for our membership base.**

Kind regards,  
Gert Steyn  
SAVA: Managing Director

