



Central European
Digital Media
Observatory



US-Serbia University Partnership for Infodemic Disorders

Coffee Beans

Prof. RNDr.Vanda Boštíková

Ph.D.

The World Health Organization defines infodemia as a process that, as a result of massive dissemination of information, including false or misleading information, causes confusion and induces risky behaviors that can harm health, lead to distrust in health authorities as well as public health programs.

The U.S. Department of State has awarded funding to the U.S.-Serbia "Infodemic Management" project submitted by the Emory University Institute of Global Health and the University of Belgrade School of Medicine. Within the framework of this project, the institutions will design and test in practice specific tools for the management of infodemic disorders.

"Higher education institutions play a key role in accelerating education and research in the field of infodemic management. Emory University and the University of Belgrade will foster the emergence of a new, informed, proactive generation of health professionals and, in turn, help create a resilient health system, strengthening and restoring society's trust in science and public health programs," says Rebecca Martin, Vice President for Global Health at Emory University.

Emory University is a private university in Atlanta, Georgia, founded in 1836. Nearly 16,000 students from the U.S. and more than 100 other countries study here. Emory Healthcare, the largest health system in Georgia, includes seven major university hospitals. The school administers the Winship Cancer Institute and the Yerkes National Primate Research Center, internationally recognized institutions engaged in infectious disease research and vaccine development. Emory University is adjacent to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and is a long-standing partner in global and national prevention and research initiatives. Among other things, it is the lead coordinator of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' National Ebola Training and Education Center. Media-known teachers include former U.S. Presidents Jimmy Carter and the Dalai Lama, two Nobel Peace Prize winners, and the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. More than twenty alumni have been awarded Rhodes Scholarships, and six others have received Pulitzer Prizes.

The Faculty of Medicine of the University of Belgrade is one of the oldest and largest medical faculties in the Balkans. This university was founded in 1808 and currently ranks first in Serbia and among the top 400 universities in the world. It has around 90 000 students. The mentioned medical faculty is number one in Serbia in providing educational and research activities and various medical services.

The cooperation between the American and Serbian universities has led to the creation of a pilot elective degree programme, called Infodemic Management. Its content is tailored to medical students as well as students of other biomedical/health disciplines. It will be taught by staff across disciplines, and will mostly be proven skills they acquired at the beginning of the pandemic. Infodemic knowledge will be analyzed to make recommendations and synthesize data for the public health field to improve emergency preparedness and response.

Therefore, the Laboratory for Infodemiology and Infodemic Management has already been established at the University of Serbia within the Faculty of Medicine in 2022. Its team is building interdisciplinary, multi-sectoral capabilities to detect and mitigate infodemic damage.

Infodemia is clearly a threat to national and global health security. The increase in the volume, velocity, and virality of health information creates the need to build a trusted health information ecosystem and the capacity to monitor emerging narratives that may otherwise harm population health and negatively impact health care delivery.

In addition to teaching competencies for monitoring, detecting, and mitigating infodemia-related public health harms, the Emory-Belgrade partnership will explore the impact of the information environment and misinformation on the declining interest of Serbian parents to vaccinate their children. As we know very well, this is a challenge that many countries around the world, including the Czech Republic, are increasingly facing.

(The resulting article was based on internal materials from Emory University, Atlanta, GA, USA.)

