

# GETTING SCIENCE RIGHT IN THE FAKE NEWS ERA

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In November, science journalist Carl Zimmer kicked off the Fifth Annual Microbiome Symposium—an event co-hosted by Penn Vet’s Center for Host-Microbial Interactions and PennCHOP Microbiome Center—with a public talk about *Science Reporting in the Age of Fake News*. In advance of the event, he offered some thoughts and advice about the fake news phenomenon.

**When it began:** In science, the issue of fake news has been growing for a while, whether it’s websites that claim to be offering information on vaccines, trying to get people to not vaccinate, or creationist websites, or websites that distort research on climate change.

**Why scientists — and everyone else — need to keep up with fake news:** This issue affects everybody. It’s important for anybody reading about science in online news sources or listening to podcasts or hearing about it on the news. And it’s also important for scientists because they need to understand how their work is being perceived, how people are learning about what they do, and what are the ways that it’s being framed, or how it’s sometimes being distorted.

**How we can be responsible readers:** We must be more aware of the misinformation and disinformation out there. You can’t passively take in things and pass them along to friends saying, “Gosh, did you see this?” If something seems to explain the world in a convincing way that fits in with the values you already have, it’s very easy to get taken in. I think we should also hold each other to task. If a friend is sharing fake news about science, we need to say, “You should stop doing that, and here’s why it’s wrong.”



Carl Zimmer

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