About Those Scary HIV Ads on Facebook...

Activists want the tech giant to take down similar ads with inaccurate claims about PrEP and HIV prevention.

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After prodding from more than 65 HIV and LGBT groups, Facebook removed a selection of ads about Truvada as PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis. The ads were for personal injury lawyers claiming that the daily HIV prevention med was associated with severe bone and kidney damage. Advocates claimed that the ads were false and misleading and that they caused public harm by scaring people away from the med. The truth is that PrEP is highly effective and safe.

Facebook's third-party fact-checkers at Health Feedback looked at the ads and concluded that they lack context and are misleading. At issue is that an HIV drug in Truvada can cause kidney damage and decrease bone density in susceptible people. This is less likely for HIV-negative people who take Truvada for prevention than it is for HIV-positive people who take it as part of treatment. The small changes in kidney and bone blood tests seen in PrEP users have not been linked to serious kidney problems or bone breaks. The claim in the ads, according to the fact-checkers, overstates the risk for those taking PrEP and also ignores that "the health benefits of taking Truvada for both HIV prevention and treatment may greatly outweigh the additional risks."

"The time is now for Facebook to take action on other similar ads," says Sarah Kate Ellis, CEO of LGBT advocacy group GLAAD, which spearheaded the effort to remove the ads. She urges Facebook to "further review how misleading and inaccurate ads are allowed to be targeted at LGBTQ and other marginalized communities."

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