You CAN ask that: Using real-world misinformation to inform sexual health education and engagement.

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Background/Purpose:

Misinformation remains a persistent feature of sexual health education, shaping how individuals understand risk, testing, and prevention. In community settings, this often presents through questions influenced by stigma, uncertainty, and gaps in health messaging. These interactions span domains including transmission risk, testing behaviours, product use, and assumptions about bodies and populations. This project aimed to identify common patterns of misinformation encountered during education sessions and examine how responding to these moments appropriately can support engagement and ensure health promotion remains responsive to current knowledge gaps.

Approach:

Meridian staff documented questions raised during sexual health education sessions across diverse community settings. These were organised into thematic areas, including misconceptions related to STI transmission, sexual health testing and responsibility, product use and toxicity, reproductive health, and assumptions about bodies and populations. Facilitators responded in real time by acknowledging questions, providing evidence-based information, and creating space for discussion. Identified themes were used to review and refine training packages and future health promotion projects, ensuring content aligns with emerging trends in misinformation.

Outcomes/Impact:

Recurring misconceptions were observed across multiple population groups, particularly in relation to STI transmission risk, sexual health testing relevance, prevention strategies, and product toxicity. These often reflected stigma, uncertainty, and the influence of online misinformation. Responding in a non-judgemental manner supported ongoing engagement, with participants more likely to ask follow-up questions and participate in discussion. Thematic review informed iterative updates to education content, supporting continual improvement and ensuring health promotion remains current and responsive to identified sexual health knowledge gaps.

Innovation and Significance:

This project positions misinformation as both a teaching moment and a mechanism for maintaining the relevance of sexual health education. By identifying patterns and

integrating real-time, stigma-aware responses into practice, it demonstrates a practical approach to aligning health promotion with how people understand and experience sexual health.

Disclosure of Interest:

None.