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Providing Actionable Information to
Advance Public Health in the Age of Twitter

Wednesday, May 8, 2019
3:30pm - 4:30pm, CHS 33-105A
Refreshments served at 3:00 PM in room 51-254 CHS

ABSTRACT:

Modern communication, typified by social networking tools such as Twitter and Facebook, has greatly accelerated the flow of information, presenting opportunities for publicly-minded people to advocate for shared interests while also presenting daunting challenges. In particular, cognitive realities such as limited attention spans and other social dynamics, including intentional efforts by some individuals to mislead others, regularly give rise to diverging perspectives and lack of agreement about the factual foundations of societal discussions. Characterizing the modern era as “the Age of Twitter” recognizes that both rapid communication and constraints on the ability of people to process information are defining features of our time. Building on the speaker’s 2018 Lowell Reed Lecture at the annual meeting of the American Public Health Association, this presentation will review how resulting social conflicts are anticipated by insights from history, politics, law, and the abuse-psychology literature. With a view toward advancing public-health priorities, the presentation will also emphasize the importance of joining a statistical-science perspective with communication insights to support the dissemination of accurate information to diverse audiences. Examples from the statistics literature will be used to illustrate how knowledge can be distilled into readily-communicated summaries that have the potential to transform key societal decisions, including about public health.