NEWS BREAK

Article: **The doctors are real, but the online sales pitches are bogus**

Section: **BUSINESS, C5**

Sunday's News Break selects an article from **Sunday, September 14, 2025,** of The Seattle Times print replica for an in-depth reading of the news. Read the selected article and answer the attached study questions.

Feel free to adapt this lesson for your students. For instance, some educators may assign this as a homework task, while others might facilitate the reading and discussion of questions within small groups or larger class discussions.

Please take a moment to review all NIE content before classroom use to ensure it is suitable for your students.*

Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.1

- Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

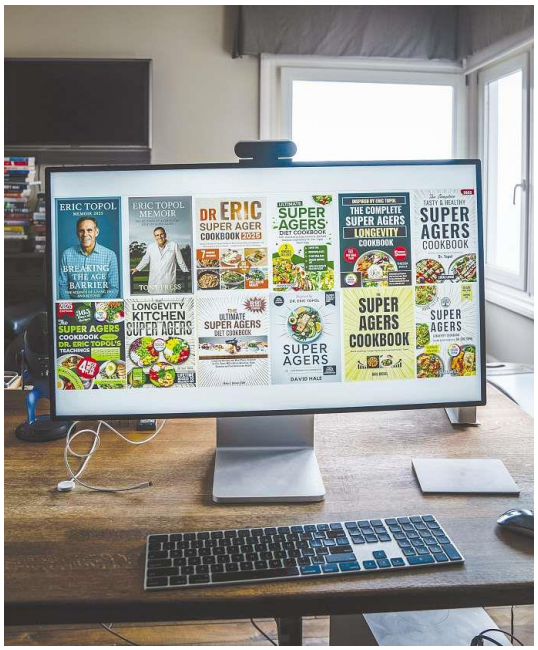
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.2

- Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

Objectives:

The article explains a new type of fraud where scammers use artificial intelligence (AI) to create fake videos and online content featuring real doctors and medical experts. The objective is to trick people into buying unproven or bogus health products. The article will explain why misinformation and deception is such a problem and what doctors are doing to fight back, including emphasizing the need for consumers to be more aware and making sure they are reading things from credible sites.

Pre-Reading Discussion:



- What do you think the article will be about, using these pictures?
- Are there any clues? What can you infer?

Vocabulary Building:

Read this sentence, what do you think the highlighted words mean using *context clues*? A ***context clue*** is a word or words that are hints and refers to the sources of information outside of words that readers may use to predict the meaning of the word.

Apovian and her colleagues ultimately found 20 accounts impersonating her, the posts and ads cobbled together from genuine details and actual photographs on her own Facebook and LinkedIn accounts. She called the campaign "***insidious*** and dangerous."

Insidious Guess:

Insidious Definition:

Comprehension Questions:

1. Dr. Robert H. Lustig is an endocrinologist, a professor emeritus of pediatrics at the University of California, San Francisco, and an author of bestselling books on obesity. He is absolutely not — despite what you might see and hear on Facebook — hawking "liquid pearls" with dubious claims about weight loss. "No injections, no surgery, just results," he appears to say in one post. Instead, someone has used artificial intelligence to make a video that imitates him and his voice — all without his knowledge, let alone _____.
2. The posts are part of a global surge of _____ hijacking the online personas of prominent medical professionals to sell unproven health products or simply to swindle gullible customers, according to the doctors, government officials and researchers who have tracked the problem.
3. While health care has long attracted quackery, AI tools developed by Big Tech are enabling the people behind these impersonations to reach millions online — and to profit from them. What three main issues is happening because of this unethical practice?
4. The Food and Drug Administration and other government agencies, as well as advocacy groups and private watchdogs, have stepped up warnings about counterfeit or fraudulent health products online, but they appear to have done little to stem the tide. Why is it difficult to stop these fraudulent posts or videos?
5. There are now hundreds of tools designed to re-create someone's image and voice, said Vijay Balasubramaniyan, CEO of Pindrop, a company that tracks deceptive uses of AI. The technology has become so sophisticated that swindlers can create convincing impostors from what?
6. Dr. Gemma Newman, a family physician in Britain and the author of two books about nutrition and health, took to Instagram in April to warn her followers about a video on TikTok that had been altered to make it seem

like she was promoting capsules of vitamin B12 and 9,000 milligrams of "pure nutrient rich beetroot." Newman was horrified: Her likeness was pushing a supplement, one that could be harmful in high doses, by playing on women's insecurities — implying the pills could make them "feel desirable, admired and confident." The video was so realistic that her own mother believed it was her. Why does she feel it's a double betrayal?

7. The impersonation of medical professionals extends beyond unproven supplements. Dr. Eric Topol, a cardiologist and the founder of the Scripps Research Translational Institute in San Diego, discovered there were dozens of apparent AI spinoffs of his newest _____ on Amazon. One of his patients unknowingly bought a fake memoir, complete with an AI-generated portrait of Topol on the cover.
8. Christopher Gardner, a nutrition scientist at Stanford, recently found himself the unwitting face of at least six YouTube channels, including one called "Nutrient Nerd." Together, the channels have hundreds of videos, many narrated by an AI-generated version of Gardner's voice. Most of the videos target older adults and dole out advice he does not endorse, addressing issues like arthritis pain and muscle loss. What could be the goal of these impersonations, as stated in the article?
9. The spread of these fakes has made standard advice about how to find good health information online suddenly feel _____, said Dr. Eleonora Teplinsky, an oncologist who has found impostors on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. "This undermines all the things we tell people about how to spot misinformation online: Are they real people? Do they have a hospital page?" she said. "How would people know it's not me?"

Class Discussion Questions:

- What surprised (or stood out to) you in the article?
- At first, I thought _____, but now I think _____?

Deeper-Dive comprehension questions for small groups, entire classes or journal entries and/ or essay prompts for extended enrichment:

- How do new AI-powered scams that impersonate doctors and medical experts exploit our trust in authority figures, and what makes this type of fraud more dangerous than traditional online scams?
- How do social media platforms like Meta and YouTube, despite having policies against impersonation, fail to effectively combat the spread of AI-powered health scams, and what are the challenges and potential solutions for them?
- Who are the people most likely to fall for these fake doctor scams, and why are they so vulnerable to being tricked? Think about more than just their money—consider things like their health, how much they know about computers, and their hope for a cure.

- Can a doctor trying to do good by sharing health advice online actually make it easier for scammers to create fake versions of them? How can experts protect themselves from being impersonated while still helping people on the internet?
- Should the government create strict new rules for AI tools that can create fake videos and voices of real people? What would those rules be, and what would be the good and bad things about them?
- If experts like doctors get tired of being faked online, what could happen to the good information they share? What would it mean for everyone if they stopped posting and left the internet to scammers?
- Dr. Caroline Apovian calls the scams "insidious and dangerous." How can something be ***insidious*** (sneaky and slowly harmful) and dangerous (risky) even if the products being sold aren't poisonous? Think about the harm it does to people's minds, their health, and society.
- When fake products are sold on huge, trusted websites like Amazon and Walmart, what does that mean for how we usually think about keeping shoppers safe? What new ideas or partnerships are needed to fight these tricky, worldwide scams?