

Words and actions that erode trust in the CDC hurt us all

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As our nation struggles to overcome the most severe threat to public health in our lifetime, we must rely on evidence-based science and data. Doing so is key to formulating an effective response that protects our patients while earning their trust in the guidance we provide.

The AMA strongly opposes fear-driven rhetoric and political intimidation aimed at the apolitical search for objective science and data. There is no room in our nation's emergency response to COVID-19 for a disdain of facts, science and public health. Solutions and policies grounded in the best science and evidence build societal trust and a common understanding in combating COVID-19. It is vital that our government's scientific institutions can pursue and openly share objective data and information free from political filters and outside influence.

Hard to regain trust

Trust and credibility is at the heart of ethical, responsible behavior and effective leadership in medicine, in business and in our daily lives. Once lost, these qualities are exceedingly difficult to regain. To risk the credibility of institutions such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or the Department of Health and Human Services for partisan political purposes is beyond unacceptable—it is unconscionable. Our AMA has and always will vigorously oppose any form of political intimidation or fear-driven rhetoric that interferes with the collection and dissemination of objective science and factual data dealing with COVID-19 or any other aspect of public health. Our response to this pandemic must not allow any type of delay, distortion, misinformation or deliberate falsehoods to come into play.

Today, our collective commitment to evidence-based science is more important than ever. Consider vaccines. We know that the repetition of disproved theories and false claims through social media and

other channels has prompted some individuals to avoid immunizing themselves and their children—leading to outbreaks of mumps, measles and other vaccine-preventable diseases.

Avoiding potential disaster

Once a COVID-19 vaccine is proven safe and effective, our patients need to know that its development was not compromised by political considerations or any factor or procedure that lies outside of evidence-based science. Efforts to undermine the credibility of the CDC also jeopardize the public's trust in a COVID-19 vaccine, with potentially disastrous consequences.

We must demand the preservation of an environment in which physicians, scientists, academic researchers and other experts can develop and freely communicate evidence-based information without fear of retribution, reprisal or any other negative outside influence. Determining the safety and efficacy of a vaccine or course of treatment must be made by scientists and researchers and affirmed by transparent science and evidence. Physicians know that trust lies at the center of the physician-patient relationship. We must do all we can to ensure trust remains an essential element of our national fight to overcome COVID-19.