

Effort to restore trust in science must begin now

DEC 1, 2020

Susan R. Bailey, MD

Immediate Past President

Today our nation stands at a crossroads. The COVID-19 case count has exploded and is continuing to rise daily. Physicians, nurses, health care and public health workers are exhausted—and they are overwhelmed, as are hospitals nationwide. The hopeful news of achieving safe and effective vaccine formulations is blunted by the knowledge that we may not yet have experienced the worst months of this catastrophic pandemic.

It is even more troubling to think that a significant portion of the population might reject vaccines once they become available because of distrust, misinformation or some other factor. Government and public health officials at every level, from the incoming administration on down, face the difficult task of restoring a level of trust in science that prevailed in our recent past.

Our AMA intends to do all we can to help restore that trust. Our laser-like focus on improving public health demands that we cooperate with every presidential administration, every Congress, every governor and every state legislature to improve patient care and promote a national vision for health that is rooted in evidence-based science and data, without regard for political ideology.

The tasks facing President-elect Joe Biden and his incoming administration are immense, numerous and critically important. Chief among those challenges is working to restore faith in public institutions and helping our nation understand and embrace evidence-based guidance and science, for that is our only path to vanquishing the COVID-19 pandemic.

Crucial in this strategy is silencing the overt politicization that has occurred—of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other institutions—and taking steps to communicate credible public health information to the public. We must also reduce misinformation and disinformation that have come to dominate our discussion of the greatest threat to public health in generations.

And we also need a national, federally coordinated strategy to defeat this disease, because this virus simply does not recognize geographic boundaries. A national strategy can also help ensure we have

the tools necessary to help reduce the spread—adequate PPE and testing—as we have forcefully demanded since March.

This pandemic has painfully highlighted weaknesses and a lack of preparation across the entire breadth and depth of our nation’s health system, and in particular our public health infrastructure. The deepening crisis we face belongs to no political party or ideology, and the responsibility to resolve it belongs to all of us. Evidence-based science that is grounded in a shared understanding of facts and data helps empower each of us to make informed decisions about our own health and informs the steps we take to protect our loved ones and communities.

No time for partisanship

Throughout our history, our AMA has adopted a nonpartisan stance in pursuing our mission to promote the art and science of medicine and the betterment of public health. Throughout this pandemic, we have advocated for and pursued policies grounded in the best available science to build societal trust and achieve a common understanding of the steps we need to take. We have done this while urging the rejection of partisan politics and all other outside influences that disrupt the pursuit of objective science and data.

But we cannot accomplish this alone. To help meet this goal, our AMA calls upon:

- | All elected officials to affirm evidence-based science and factual data at every turn.
- | The media, including social media platforms, to consistently convey factual information from credible sources, while challenging and rejecting misinformation.

As always, our AMA stands ready to work with anyone and everyone to improve access to meaningful and affordable health care, while striving to reduce and eventually eliminate the racial and ethnic inequities that continue to afflict our society as whole and health care in particular.

We know the road that lies before us will challenge our resources and resolve as never before. But I also know we can complete this difficult journey by putting our differences aside and working together with a singleness of purpose, and by holding our leaders accountable to put science and evidence at the center of our fight against COVID-19.