

Terrifying bomb threats against children's hospitals must stop

OCT 6, 2022

Kevin B. O'Reilly

News Editor

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the AMA and the Children's Hospital Association (CHA) are asking U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland and the Department of Justice to investigate the rising threats of violence against physicians, hospitals and families of children for providing and seeking evidence-based gender-affirming care.

"Whether it's newborns receiving intensive care, children getting cancer treatments or families accessing compassionate care for their transgender adolescents, all patients seeking treatment deserve to get the care they need without fear for their personal safety," said AAP President Moira Szilagyi, MD, PhD.

"We cannot stand by as threats of violence against our members and their patients proliferate with little consequence," Dr. Szilagyi said. "We call on the Department of Justice to investigate these attacks and social media platforms to reduce the spread of the misinformation enabling them."

The AAP and AMA collectively represent more than 270,000 physicians and medical students, while CHA represents more than 220 children's hospitals across the country. The organizations wrote to Garland (PDF) urging "swift action to investigate and prosecute all organizations, individuals, and entities responsible."

Learn about AMA policy on the need to protect physicians and other health care workers in society.

Intimidation has no place in health care

"Individuals in all workplaces have the right to a safe environment, out of harm's way and free of intimidation or reprisal," said AMA President Jack Resneck Jr., MD. "As physicians, we condemn groups that promote hate-motivated intolerance and toxic misinformation that can lead to grave real-world violence and extremism and jeopardize patients' health outcomes."

“The AMA will continue to work with federal, state and local law enforcement officials to develop and implement strategies that protect hard-working, law-abiding physicians and other health care workers from senseless acts of violence, abuse and intimidation,” Dr. Resneck added.

In their letter to Garland, the organizations said they “are committed to the full spectrum of patient care—from prevention to critical care. We stand with the physicians, nurses, mental health specialists, and other health care professionals who provide evidence-based health care, including gender-affirming care, to children and adolescents.”

Read Dr. Resneck’s AMA Leadership Viewpoints column about why everyone deserves quality medical care delivered without bias.

Social media companies can help

The AAP, AMA and CHA also are calling on technology platforms to do more to stop the rhetoric that often incites threats or acts of violence and has led to harassment campaigns across the country, much of it directed at children’s hospitals and the physicians and other health professionals who work there.

Twitter, TikTok and Meta—which owns Facebook and Instagram—can help prevent coordinated campaigns of disinformation. Physicians and hospitals asked the platforms to take bolder action when false information is shared about specific institutions and doctors. They also urged social media companies to enforce safety and hateful conduct policies to stop the endangerment of patients, families, physicians and health care staff.

“We are committed to providing safe, supportive and inclusive health care environments for each and every child and family, and the clinicians and staff who are dedicated to caring for children,” said CHA President Amy Wimpey Knight. “Threats and acts of violence are not a solution, nor a substitute, for civil dialogue about issues of a child or teen’s health and well-being. At CHA, we are committed to working across sectors to prevent misleading and inflammatory comments that result in threats to those caring for patients.”

Learn more about social media companies’ obligation to crack down on medical misinformation.