

A closer look at two COVID-19 controversies



FBI Raids Alternative Coronavirus Clinic: Some of you may have been outraged, as I was, at the spectacle of armed FBI agents raiding a medical practice in Michigan that was offering patients vitamin C IV drips for prevention and/or treatment of COVID-19. It seemed like the most egregious violation of medical freedom of choice since the infamous government raid on Dr. Jonathan Wright's Tahoma Clinic back in 1992, dubbed the "Vitamin B bust."

Millions of natural health consumers were incensed back then, and the raid became a *cause célèbre*. It spawned a now-classic video, starring Mel Gibson. The clever segment depicted jack-booted commandos storming a home. They discover Mel in the kitchen innocently hoisting a bottle of vitamin C tablets: "Guys, guys, it's just vitamins!" he says.

The outcry over the Wright raid helped spawn DSHEA—the Dietary Supplement Health Education Act of 1995—an admittedly uneasy truce that provides a legal carve out for nutritional supplements, so long as they're safe and don't make specific disease claims.

But this new vitamin C raid is not that. I was suspicious from the start and withheld my knee-jerk reflex to stoke outrage at the government's seeming overreach.

First of all, the FBI, for all its faults, doesn't give a hoot if a doctor is administering an "unauthorized therapy". Violations of "standards of practice", an infraction sometimes invoked when authorities want to crack down on integrative physicians using unconventional treatments, come under the aegis of local state medical boards.

State medical board standards vary. Some states have an absolute prohibition on certain procedures, like chelation therapy; others are virtual "free fire zones." I'm pretty sure that IV vitamin C, while not generally condoned, is not banned in any state (unless it's performed by a practitioner not licensed to administer it—and the credentialing threshold for IVs varies from state to state, with some states allowing naturopathic physicians to do it, others not).

Alternatively, a city or state department of health might get involved where unsafe or dangerous practices have the potential to spread disease—as with lack of sterile procedures. Or, the FDA might swoop in to confiscate an unapproved drug or device.

But never the FBI—unless it's about *dollars*. Yep, if you bill Medicare or Medicaid for a procedure not explicitly covered, that constitutes fraud, and the Federal Government will come down on you like a ton of bricks. They'll raid your facility, seize your records and computers, and begin prosecution, with huge civil and

criminal penalties.

The fact is, vitamin IVs are not generally covered by insurance, and, because they're expensive, shifty doctors have figured out ways to disguise them as "chemotherapy" or "hydration" or some such dodge. That may pass muster for a while until government auditors or whistleblowers highlight the deception. And then those armed guys in FBI windbreakers show up unannounced at your clinic and demand records. A fraud indictment follows and the scheme collapses.

So Dr. Charles Mok, who ran the Allure Medical Clinic in question, is no folk hero. There were numerous lapses in hygiene there, including the fact that workers continued on the job without quarantine after confirmation of coronavirus infection, as well as other bush-league billing irregularities.

All the more the shame, because his sloppy and alleged illegal conduct casts aspersions on a legitimate therapy. For details, please listen to my recent podcast with authoritative vitamin C expert Jeanne Drisko MD.

Those Pesky Masks: Wearing a mask has become synonymous with adherence to civic duty. One gets dirty looks when not wearing facial covering where I reside in Manhattan; even runners and cyclists have been accosted for not conforming. Stores here won't let you in without them. Expressway signs exhort you to use a mask in public. My building management issued a directive to residents that, even when descending to the lobby just to check our mailboxes, we're required to wear them.

Early during the lockdown, I obtained some vaunted N95 respirator masks for myself and family members. They're superior to ordinary surgical or cloth masks, which, according to some studies, are no better than no masks at all when it comes to protecting vulnerable individuals from viral particles transmitted by coughing or sneezing.

The researchers were unable to weigh in on whether non-respirator face masks decrease transmission from asymptomatic individuals with COVID-19, or those who are not coughing—which is, after all, the chief rationale for the blanket order to adopt facial covering.

I found wearing the superior N95 mask uncomfortable and oppressive. While shopping, for example, I found that I was becoming anxious and slightly disoriented. I chalked that up to the new social distancing strictures and the "ick" factor of being in a crowd. I tried to get out of the store as soon as possible and once outside, I slid the mask off to gulp some fresh air. I realized that, uncharacteristically, I had forgotten to buy a few items on my mental list.

But I soon realized that my mask experience wasn't unique. Virtually no one can exercise with those restrictive respirator masks that are best suited to protect hospital workers. One person described it as the equivalent of trying to jog at 10,000 feet altitude.

This article shed light on what I had experienced. Written before the arrival of COVID-19, it was entitled "**Respirator masks protect health but impact performance: a review**". In characteristically dry language, the investigators report, "*Respirators have been found to interfere with many physiological and psychological aspects of task performance at levels from resting to maximum exertion.*"

It's not surprising. By inhibiting dispersal of exhaled carbon dioxide, these masks can cause levels of that waste product of respiration to build up, compromising

brain function, with impacts on anxiety levels, coordination and performance.

Hence, this story: A New Jersey man crashed into a utility pole while wearing a restrictive N95 mask in his car (for what reason?). The **New York Post** reported: *“Lincoln Park police believe that the driver, who was not named, lost consciousness while behind the wheel Thursday from lack of oxygen and breathing in excessive carbon dioxide thanks to the mask.”*

Masks *do* confer some protection to both the wearer and potential infectees. But their efficacy is limited* and is not comparable to what can be achieved with full PPE worn by hospital workers. It may be that the “best” masks—N95s—offer a trade-off between safety and practicality.

*See this study comparing cloth masks to medical masks.