

Government urges crackdown on “health misinformation”—who decides?

written by Dr. Ronald Hoffman | July 23, 2021



The pandemic is subsiding, due to a combination of vaccination, the high percentage of Americans who have acquired natural immunity after exposure to COVID, as well as better therapies.

But there’s a worrisome uptick in cases, and the dreaded Delta variant is making inroads worldwide. This has ramped up concern that we may be in for a new “surge”.

It’s unclear if that’s inevitable, but health authorities are nevertheless leveraging fear of Delta to fuel a push for vaccine compliance. But this is prompting some audacious assaults on health freedom of choice.

Last weekend White House press secretary Jen Psaki announced: “We are regularly in touch with social media platforms . . . to coordinate our efforts to combat misinformation.” This represents unprecedented collusion between the government and media to suppress free speech.

And Surgeon General Vivek Murthy issued an advisory—the first of his tenure—calling health misinformation an “urgent threat” that puts lives at risk and threatens to prolong the pandemic. He warns “Limiting the spread of health misinformation is a moral and civic imperative that will require a whole-of-society effort.”

President Biden was even more emphatic. “They’re killing people,” he says of Facebook’s laxity in not even more aggressively cracking down on COVID-19 misinformation.

But misinformation is in the eye of the beholder. When questioned as to the definition of pornography, Supreme Court Chief Justice Potter Stuart famously averred he couldn’t articulate it precisely, but “I know it when I see it”.

For example, it’s one thing to suggest that Bill Gates is covertly using vaccines to micro-chip the world’s populace in order to track them with RFID devices; it’s another to discuss real, albeit uncommon, side effects of the vaccine. Where do you draw the line?

And what happens when the rapidly-emerging science changes, as it so often does? For example, at first even I was skeptical of “conspiracy theory” claims that the virus was man-made. But now, even leading virologists are endorsing that theory. Posting about that could get you canceled last year; this year, the subject is debated openly in top medical journals.

Censorship like this is crossing a line. It’s reminiscent of wartime information suppression (“Loose lips sink ships!”). Under the auspices of maintaining wartime morale, President Woodrow Wilson signed the Sedition Act in 1918. Under threat of 20 years of imprisonment, the law made it illegal to “utter, print, write, or publish any disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language about the form of government of the United States.”

Suppression of truthful information about the pandemic made things worse, when, in the immediate aftermath of World War I, the “Spanish Flu” of 1919-1920 infected 1/3 of the world’s population, killing 50 million people, including 750 thousand Americans. The extent of the contagion was downplayed lest health authorities appear “defeatist”.

Now, I am of the opinion that the COVID vaccine is an incredible technological breakthrough, and has served to bend the curve downward in countries where it’s been deployed. It is, by-and-large, safe and effective. I am not rooting for the vaccine effort to crash and burn.

But is it heresy to point out the potential downsides of the vaccines in terms of limits to their efficacy, or to highlight their potential to cause side effects, however uncommon?

When you see a drug ad on TV, there’s a long recitation of a litany of side effects—it’s required by law. Full disclosure allows consumers to make informed choices about risks and benefits.

It’s not even strategic to withhold and even actively suppress information—it’ll just prompt more skepticism and backlash. The vaccine-hesitant will be emboldened. Administration opponents will be handed ammo. If there’s no counter-information or diversity of opinion, people are going to think something is fishy.

The censorship extends way beyond just vaccine “misinformation”. Last year, the Federal Trade Commission initiated a strike force to stamp out “fraudulent” claims about natural cures for COVID. Caught up in the dragnet were earnest physicians discussing nutritional support for immunity alongside quacks purveying wacky nostrums.

Then, legislators hostile to supplements snuck in an amendment to last year’s COVID relief bill that further empowered the FTC to fine whoever they deemed in violation of their arbitrary truth standards. Benignly titled the COVID-19 Consumer Protection Act, the law “prohibits deceptive acts or practices associated with the treatment, cure, prevention, mitigation or diagnosis of COVID-19,” violation of which can result in steep monetary penalties.

Shaping of health information extends beyond traditional social media and

search engines. Wikipedia is especially subject to anti-natural therapy bias. Gary Null has published a detailed critique of Wikipedia's slanted reviews.

Larry Sanger, one of Wikipedia's co-founders, recently declared, "I no longer trust the website I created." Sanger elaborates: "If you look at the articles that Wikipedia has, you can just see how they are simply mouthing the view of the World Economic Council or World Economic Forum, and the World Health Organisation, the CDC and various other establishment mouthpieces like Fauci – they take their cues from them . . . There's a global enforcement of a certain point of view, which is amazing to me as a libertarian . . . Eastern medicine is basically called quackery in dismissive, quite judgmental, language."

If you look up "chiropractic" on Wikipedia, you'll find the following disparaging description: "Chiropractic is a pseudoscientific alternative medicine . . . controlled clinical studies of treatments used by chiropractors have not found evidence that chiropractic manipulation is effective." Same for acupuncture. Naturopaths fare even worse: "Naturopathy is considered by the medical profession to be ineffective and harmful, raising ethical issues about its practice."

Is it any wonder that people are skeptical of the media? Or of government health pronouncements exemplified by their decades-long campaign to get Americans to adopt a low-fat diet, which has only spawned a pandemic of obesity and metabolic unfitness?

The penalty for writing about this? I may be throttled down, or shadow-banned from social media. But you can always listen to my Intelligent Medicine podcasts and read my articles at DrHoffman.com.

I won't be silenced.

(Support the Alliance for Natural Health, of which I'm Medical Director, to safeguard your health freedom.)