

The Forbidden COVID-19 Chronicles: August 16, 2021
Vaccine Skeptics Are Scientifically Literate
Pamela A. Popper, President
Wellness Forum Health

In last week's newsletter, I reported that as of early summer, the actual vaccine uptake rate was about 20% lower than our rulers and health officials were reporting. During the last several weeks things have not improved. Every week, states are tossing expired doses due to lack of demand. Thus the current hysteria. Our rulers have threatened to have government workers go door-to-door; have demanded that healthcare institutions require the shot for employees; and in some areas have demanded that people present vaccine cards in order to dine in restaurants and shop. The pushback in response has been even stronger. Unless the government is prepared to start locking people up in camps – and the CDC has posted some information indicating that this is a possibility¹ – we may be at an impasse.

Part of the problem is that government and health officials, along with many arrogant members of the public, have the mistaken notion that people who are refusing to get a COVID vaccine are stupid or misinformed. Condescension has never been a great strategy for winning anyone over. And recent research conducted at MIT shows that it is even less likely to win over COVID jab refusers, because, the study shows, skeptics are highly informed, scientifically literate, and sophisticated in their use of data.² We're not idiots, in other words.

MIT researchers examined hundreds of thousands of social media posts and found that the people referred to as skeptics use data sets from official sources and their conclusions are quite sophisticated. Lead researcher Crystal Lee says, "A lot of people think of metrics like infection rates as objective. But they're clearly not, based on how much debate there is on how to think about the pandemic. That's why we say data visualizations have become a battleground." Data visualization is the use of charts, graphs and maps to help people understand information, trends, and patterns.

Lee and her group looked at networks of communities that interacted with one another on social media. They found that groups comprised of skeptics were sharing data visualizations at least as much if not more than other groups. And their data visualizations were sophisticated and just as polished as those posted on public health dashboards. "It's a very striking finding," Lee said "It shows that characterizing anti-mask groups as data-illiterate or not engaging with the data, is empirically false."

Contrary to what many people think, skeptics were not ignoring data at all. Instead, they discussed how different kinds of data were collected and why. Lee's group concluded that their arguments were "quite nuanced," and that groups often pointed out how the way some data were reported could be quite misleading. In response, skeptics would create their own data sets, and even provide instruction on how to

create accurate graphs and charts. "I've been to livestreams where people screen share and look at the data portal from the state of Georgia," reported Lee. "Then they'll talk about how to download the data and import it into Excel."

Co-author Graham Jones says a skeptic's "idea of science is not listening passively as experts at a place like MIT tell everyone else what to believe." He says that the skeptics reflect "deep-seated values of self-reliance and anti-expertise that date back to the founding of the country." In other words, people who are skeptical of the current public health narrative are independent thinkers, not sheep.

Lee adds that "...data analysis is important," but that just posting data does not convince people who believe that the scientific establishment is not trustworthy. Jevin West at the University of Washington agrees, and says that the same data can be used to report opposite sides of an issue. He says that Lee's study "...underscores the complexity of the problem."

An article in *National Review* concurs, stating that distrust of public health is, indeed a major issue.³ According to author Michael Brendan Dougherty, vaccine skeptics think that excessive fear of COVID is the reason for unconstitutional restrictions. They see consenting to the vaccine as a condition of freedom as a promise to consent to house arrest the next time a new variant becomes front-page news.

Dougherty reports an example of a public health message that backfires when viewed by skeptics. The spokesperson reports that "...the Delta variant is a "more contagious strain" of the virus, that life-threatening complications and long-term effects on brain and body can occur in young people; it's available for free; and it's about joy - getting the vaccine helps you travel more safely, visiting the people and places you love."

Dougherty rightly points out that the messenger does not state that the Delta variant is actually more dangerous – just more contagious. And most of the country has already been set free, so vaccination status won't change much for many people. Dougherty writes that a barrage of public health messages that do not address actual concerns are often interpreted as more government propaganda; and that censorship does not help either.

Dougherty writes that the most serious phenomenon fueling vaccine hesitancy is the "...bizarre public health treatment of children." Children have a 0% chance, statistically, of serious illness or death from COVID-19; masks can cause serious negative consequences; and at one point the CDC recommended that children wear masks outdoors. Dougherty writes that the CDC and Fauci repeat alarmist, fear-mongering nonsense about children and COVID which leads many people to believe that health authorities are lying about risks in order to justify unnecessary medical interventions while censoring all dissent.

Dougherty concludes that convincing vaccine skeptics will require discontinuation of "...efforts that seem like open manipulation in defiance of the evidence" and "...leveling with people." He notes that Americans are "...unruly and in a sour mood about their authority figures." Amen to that.

What Lee, Dougherty, and many others who are trying to make sense of vaccine hesitancy are missing, however, is that distrust of government and medicine did not start with the COVID debacle. It started decades ago with other fake pandemics; with other incorrect mantras such as "early detection saves lives," and dozens of other incorrect messages about health-related issues such as "vaccines are safe and effective." COVID is the result of the fact that organized medicine and drug companies, along with their government partners, have been lying and hurting and killing people for decades – and getting away with it. So, of course they assumed they would get away with targeting the entire world population in 2020.

Will they get away with it? That's up to us. There are good reasons to believe that the resistance is bigger and more determined than our rulers thought it would be. As government messages have become more incoherent and they seem more desperate, the number of people joining us has multiplied exponentially. There are good reasons to be hopeful. Our odds get better with each new person who joins us. If you're not already on board, this is the time to act. Email pampopper@msn.com to take action now.

¹ Interim Operational Considerations for Implementing the Shielding Approach to Prevent COVID-19 Infections in Humanitarian Settings. Updated July 26, 2020. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/global-covid-19/shielding-approach-humanitarian.html>

² Daniel Ackerman. When more COVID-19 data doesn't equal more understanding. *MIT News* March 4 2021

³ Michael Brendan Dougherty. Convincing the Skeptics. *National Review* July 16 2021