

December 19, 2017

The Honorable Eric D. Hargan
Acting Secretary
US Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Mr. Hargan,

On behalf of the more than 450,000 physicians and medical students represented by the combined memberships of the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American College of Physicians, and the American Psychiatric Association, we write to express our collective alarm at public reports which suggest that the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other public health agencies have been advised to not use certain terms and terminology in budgets and program analysis documents.

According to media reports, the CDC has been asked to discontinue the use of seven words and phrases common to public health, epidemiology, and research: "diversity," "fetus," "transgender," "vulnerable," "entitlement," "science-based" and "evidence-based." While any suggestion made to the nation's leading public health and prevention agency to limit medical and scientific vocabulary would be concerning, the suggestion that the CDC disregard the importance of science and evidence in public-facing documents is unacceptable.

The reported alternative phrase, "CDC bases its recommendations on science in consideration with community standards and wishes" is not equivalent. As you know, "community standards and wishes" is not a credible term or phrase in the research or scientific community and it certainly should never be the standard by which the CDC bases its recommendations. This attempt to influence the CDC's language reflects bold political interference in science, medicine, and public health.

Following the publication of this report, CDC Director Brenda Fitzgerald, MD, emphasized the CDC's continued commitment to science, saying on Twitter:

"you may be understandably concerned about recent media reports alleging that CDC is banned from using certain words in budget documents. I want to assure you that CDC remains committed to our public health mission as a science- and evidence-based institution."

Our members are the frontline physicians providing care to millions of people each day in communities large and small, urban and rural. Our members are promoters of prevention, educators, patient advocates, all at the leading edge of each public health outbreak. Our members rely upon the CDC to provide them with sound, unbiased, evidence that is based on the rigors of modern science.

HHS must end any attempt to derail the CDC's public health mission. Instead, HHS should support the CDC's work and its science and evidence based recommendations that contribute to the betterment of our diverse population. Our groups would readily setup a meeting to discuss this issue further.

Respectfully,

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