

May 6, 2021

Joint Statement on Misleading COVID-19 Information

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC and the First Nations Health Authority stand united and firmly against the spread of misinformation about COVID-19, which is currently circulating on social media and other channels. In recent months, we have become aware of and concerned about reports that some BC physicians are spreading information that contradicts public health orders and guidance. This has included misinformation that promotes anti-vaccine, anti-mask wearing, anti-physical distancing and anti-lockdown stances, as well as COVID-19 treatments that are not supported by widely accepted scientific evidence.

Physicians need to be aware that when they identify themselves as a physician, the public tends to place great weight on their opinion even if that physician has no expertise in a medical specialty, such as population health or infectious diseases. The confidence entrusted by the public places even greater responsibility on physicians when making pronouncements about the COVID-19 pandemic.

Misinformation breaches public trust and is contrary to the ethical obligations set out in the Canadian Medical Association's *Code of Ethics and Professionalism*. Physicians must be guided by the laws that govern them, regulatory practice standards and guidelines, the *Code of Ethics and Professionalism*, and scientific evidence when giving their opinions about COVID-19.

"Public statements from physicians that contradict public health orders and guidance are confusing and potentially harmful to patients," said Dr. Heidi Oetter, registrar and CEO of the College. "Those who put the public at risk with misinformation may face an investigation by the College, and if warranted, regulatory action."

As our province continues to fight the spread of COVID-19, the harm caused by misleading and unsupported information is evident across BC, particularly in Indigenous communities. Data shows Indigenous people are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and test positive for the virus at more than double the rate of the rest of BC's population.

"Indigenous people already face barriers to accessing health care due to systemic racism," said Dr. Nel Wieman, acting deputy chief medical officer of the First Nations Health Authority. "Misleading information adds another barrier at a time when the COVID-19 vaccine needs to be delivered to Indigenous people as quickly as possible."

The safety of patients is paramount, and we must all do our part to ensure it is not jeopardized by misinformation during this critical time.