

Committee to Protect Medicare: Wisconsin physicians blast Sen. Johnson for promoting unproven treatment for COVID-19

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View the press call [here](#).

NOTE: The physicians below are speaking in their capacity as members of the Committee to Protect Medicare. They should be identified only as indicated in this news release.

MADISON, Wis. — Wisconsin physicians today expressed alarm that U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wisconsin) is promoting unproven, and potentially dangerous, treatments for COVID-19. The physicians signed a [letter](#) opposing medically inaccurate misinformation that home remedies can cure COVID-19, which Johnson is spotlighting in a hearing of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee that he chairs.

“Sen. Ron Johnson is using his high profile and his national platform to give validity to unproven, medically inaccurate information that will put more lives at risk,” said Dr. Robert Freedland, an ophthalmologist in La Crosse and the Wisconsin State Lead for the Committee to Protect Medicare. “In a pandemic that has killed a quarter-of-a-million Americans, we need to spend more time working to get rapid-result tests, protective equipment and vaccines when they become available to hard-hit communities in Wisconsin and across the nation. Instead of doing the hard work

that will actually save lives, Sen. Johnson is giving a platform to some voices who appear at odds with evidence-based science and whose baseless, reckless recommendations will endanger lives.”

More than 40 physicians across Wisconsin signed a letter criticizing the ultra-conservative [Association of American Physicians and Surgeons](#) for promoting so-called “home-based” treatments for COVID-19. These suggested treatments, cataloged in “[A guide to home-based COVID-19 treatment: Step-by-step doctors’ plan that could save your life,](#)” contain medically inaccurate misinformation that threatens people’s health and safety.

Sen. Johnson held a hearing Thursday that included testimony from Peter McCullough, MD, of Baylor University Medical Center; Harvey Risch, MD, epidemiology professor at Yale University and George C. Fareed, MD, of Pioneers Medical Center. McCullough is a consultant on “A guide to home-based COVID-19 treatment.” Risch advocates the use of [hydroxychloroquine](#) and Fareed [wrote](#) to President Trump promoting the use of hydroxychloroquine.

In their testimony Thursday, the three doctors promoted the use of hydroxychloroquine and corticosteroids as an early treatment for COVID-19 patients. Both drugs have been linked to serious harm in COVID-19 patients, including increased risks of heart attacks and deaths.

“Sen. Ron Johnson is signalling a step backward in our fight against COVID-19 by giving validation to an organization with ideas that are not supported by the science and the evidence,” said Dr. Ann Helms, a neurologist in Milwaukee. “The outgoing Trump Administration squandered an entire year rejecting science, with disastrous consequences, and Sen. Johnson is about to make the same mistake. With COVID-19 skyrocketing in Wisconsin and nationally, Sen. Johnson can better protect all Americans by partnering with the incoming new administration and providing relief to our families, small businesses and hospitals immediately.”

The physicians’ letter is below:

As physicians, we have a duty to speak up when we see harm.

Recent efforts by the [Association of American Physicians and Surgeons](#) to promote so-called “home-based” treatments for COVID-19 are reckless, dangerous and potentially life-threatening to millions of Americans who are already suffering during

this pandemic.

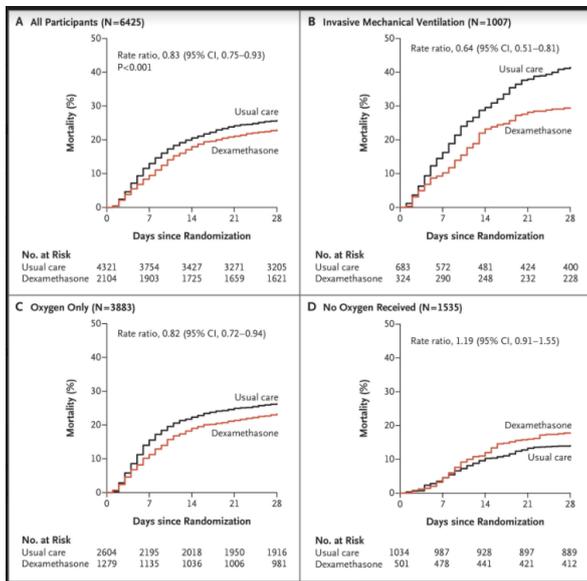
We are even more concerned when senior government policymakers such as U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson, who chairs the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee that plays a key role in coordinating our nation's pandemic response, endorse these unproven "home-based" remedies.

These suggested treatments, cataloged in "A guide to home-based COVID-19 treatment: Step-by-step doctors' plan that could save your life," contain medically inaccurate misinformation that threatens people's health and safety. Authors [Jane Orient](#), MD, executive director of the AAPS, and [Elizabeth Lee Vliet](#), MD, co-authored this guide with contributions from physicians such as [Stella Immanuel](#), who attributes endometriosis and other gynecological conditions to demons and says [alien DNA](#) is being used in developing medicines.

Orient's and Vliet's guide is laden with claims that data and evidence do not support.

The guide promotes [hydroxychloroquine](#), an arthritis and anti-malarial drug that the Food and Drug Administration warns is unlikely to be effective in treating COVID-19 and may in fact cause harm in certain patients. The FDA [cautions](#): "In light of ongoing serious cardiac adverse events and other potential serious side effects, the known and potential benefits of chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine no longer outweigh the known and potential risks for the authorized use."

The guide's recommendation for COVID-19 patients to take dexamethasone is potentially dangerous. While dexamethasone benefits critical patients, current [evidence](#) shows that use of the corticosteroid actually increases the risk of death in COVID19 patients who don't require supplemental oxygen.



The home-remedy guide recommends outpatients take Eliquis or low-molecular weight heparin, a blood thinner. The [National Institutes of Health](#) cautions that data doesn't support this treatment for either hospitalized or non-hospitalized COVID-19 patients.

By promoting this guide, the authors, contributors and those associated with them perpetuate the dangerous perception that individuals with COVID-19 can treat themselves at home, using commonly available medications, when data and evidence are either inconclusive about the effectiveness of these treatments or, worse, that they may actually cause harm.

Furthermore, the guide may encourage people with COVID-19 to self-diagnose themselves at home when medical and public health experts are still learning more about this new coronavirus. This may, in turn, discourage people who need a full spectrum of care for COVID-19 from seeking the professional and comprehensive treatment they need, including treatment at a hospital.

As cases continue to rise rapidly in Wisconsin and COVID-19 sickens and kills more people every day, individuals and families deserve to get information that is accurate and evidence-based.

By promoting misleading and medically inaccurate misinformation, the AAPS — which [rejects mask wearing](#) and social distancing despite the [overwhelming evidence](#) of their effectiveness at reducing COVID-19 infections — is putting

people's lives at risk. That this threat to health and safety comes from physicians who took an oath to do no harm is an outrage and deserves to be roundly condemned.

About the Committee to Protect Medicare

The Committee to Protect Medicare is an advocacy organization made up of frontline doctors engaging in direct advocacy and communications in support of a stronger health care system in America. To learn more:

<http://committeetoprotect.org/>