

Bill Kaplan: Follow science not quacks for COVID-19 facts

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In September, New York GOP Representative Sherwood Boehlert died. The 12-term Republican chaired the House Science Committee from 2001 - 2006. Importantly, Boehlert transcended partisan politics: “We should be guided by sound science. We shouldn’t have politics determining science.”

However, Colin Powell’s tragic death from COVID-19 despite being fully vaccinated has elicited monstrous misinformation from COVID-19 vaccine skeptics. His death has been politicized to cast doubt on COVID-19 vaccines’ effectiveness. Just before news of Powell’s death, Wisconsin GOP Senator Ron Johnson erroneously claimed: “The mounting data shows that they’re not working or are as safe as we all hoped” Although Johnson’s misinformation shortly preceded news of Powell’s death, overwhelmingly Americans getting infected, hospitalized or dying from COVID-19 are unvaccinated. Critically, “Powell’s immune system had quite likely been weakened by multiple myeloma, a cancer of white blood cells. Both the disease and the treatment can make people more susceptible to infections” (NYT).

Only 3 GOP senators, including Johnson, have not been vaccinated (Forbes). Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said: “I’ve been a lifelong champion of vaccinations. Mountains of evidence tell us these shots are safe, effective, and dramatically shrink the odds of severe disease or death from COVID. ... vaccines are the way to defend ourselves and our families from this terrible virus. They’re also how we stay on offense against COVID as a country.” Wisconsin Republicans, such as former Governor Scott Walker and Assembly Majority Leader Jim Steineke, agree with McConnell.

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Doctors, nurses and scientists are strong vaccination advocates. The American Medical Association said: “The FDA has approved the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine and the meticulously collected evidence from more than 100 million vaccinated Americans is clear: the vaccines we have to defeat COVID-19 are safe, effective, and the only way out of the pandemic.” Similarly, the Wisconsin Medical Society said: “The only hope to beat this virus is through a significant increase in vaccinations.” And, minority medical groups, including the National Medical Association, agree. Finally, all national hospital organizations and Wisconsin healthcare systems are leading on getting Americans vaccinated.

A new Kaiser Family Foundation report “estimates that nationally more than 90,000 deaths from COVID-19 since June could have been prevented with vaccines. More than half of those preventable deaths occurred in September.” And, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services said that unvaccinated Wisconsinites were 4.6 times more likely to become infected than the vaccinated, 8.8 times more likely to require hospitalization and 18.8 times more likely to die from COVID-19. Moreover, low levels of vaccination, healthcare disparities and the Delta variant in rural Wisconsin led to widespread misery. And, racial disparities in treatment and vaccination are glaring.

COVID-19 variants remain a huge threat. “Some variations allow the virus to spread more easily or make it resistant to treatments or vaccines. ...As the virus spreads, it has new opportunities to change and may become more difficult to stop” (CDC). Vaccines are the best way to control and end the pandemic. Listen to doctors and facts – not quacks. Get vaccinated!

– Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C., for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 – 2009.