



AMERICAN COLLEGE OF GASTROENTEROLOGY

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December 21, 2017

The Honorable Eric D. Hargan
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services (HHS)
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington D.C. 20201

Brenda Fitzgerald, MD
Director
Centers for Disease Control and
Prevention (CDC)
U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services
1600 Clifton Road Atlanta, GA 30333

Dear Mr. Hargan and Dr. Fitzgerald,

On behalf of the American College of Gastroenterology (ACG) I am writing to express concern over recent reports that the CDC and other HHS agencies have been advised not to publish statements containing certain words, such as “evidence-based” or “science-based.” While HHS has since clarified and refuted these reports, nevertheless, the College wanted to highlight in writing the importance these words have in clinical research and patient treatment.

The ACG is a physician organization that currently represents over 14,500 members providing gastroenterology specialty care. We focus on the issues confronting the gastrointestinal (GI) specialist in delivering high-quality patient care. ACG also provides its members with the most accurate and up-to-date scientific information on digestive health and treatment of GI disorders.

The CDC and other HHS agencies employ among the best and brightest scientists in public health care. ACG and our members rely on much of the research, data, and public health emergency response strategies published and deployed by HHS agencies, such as the CDC. Their expertise keeps Americans safe and keeps physicians well informed. For example, the CDC and other HHS agencies have been instrumental in increasing colorectal cancer screening utilization rates. According to the American Cancer Society, colorectal cancer is the 2nd highest cancer killer combining both males and females. Over 52,000 people in the U.S. will have died from colorectal cancer in 2017, and over 135,400 people were projected to be diagnosed with colorectal cancer in 2017 as well. The sad irony is that colorectal cancer is largely preventable. We know this in part due to the scientific and evidence-based research from the CDC. Public health officials and physicians have a better understanding of strategies designed to reduce gaps in care and promote public health precisely because of the language intentionally used in this scientific research. Words matter in clinical medicine. Without important language such as “evidence-based” or “science-based,” it is difficult to make the distinction between sound data and mere assumption.

The ACG hopes to continue our collaborations with HHS agencies and to work together in promoting public health policies in the U.S. We are encouraged that HHS officials have since clarified these recent reports, as scientific language and terminology have a meaningful impact on our members and patients.

Sincerely,

Irving M. Pike, MD, FAGC
President
American College of Gastroenterology