



## Politics Should Not Dictate Public Health

BY SHEILA BUSH



In the last issue of Wyoming Medicine, I discussed leadership during COVID-19 and the challenges associated with leading through difficult circumstances. I implored our readers to continually ask, “What don’t I know?” and to assume the best in others. I’m here to make this request of you again. Leadership during COVID-19 has not grown easier, as opinions harden and divisions grow. The novelty of the novel coronavirus has worn off and people from every background are frustrated.

This issue of Wyoming Medicine is focused on the outstanding, but grueling, work of our public healthcare providers across Wyoming. These unsung heroes of Wyoming don’t receive the credit they are due because the masses often don’t even realize they exist. Public health has earned a curtain pull to shine a light on the extensive lifesaving work they do.


Wyoming has recently experienced an explosion of cases, repeatedly breaking single-day records. Hospitals are suffering from capacity issues and face sobering projections as cold, flu (and now) COVID season begins to ramp up. Healthcare workers are battling burnout and anxiety, while our general population staggers from economic impacts, political tension and lifestyle changes. Healthcare is stressed, our people are stressed, emotions are running high, and the need for things to “go back to normal” increases each day.

However, no matter how we feel about it, science doesn’t change. That’s not to say we aren’t learning more each day, but the virus doesn’t alter its course just because life would be easier if this all just went away.

Wyoming has consistently been listed in the top 10 least restrictive states during COVID-19. The philosophical approach here has always been to encourage personal responsibility, rather than enforcing strict regulations. Initially, when we were in the early stages of learning about the new coronavirus, Wyoming implemented mandates to equip hospitals and clinics with the appropriate PPE and to allow time to prepare our healthcare and testing systems. But ultimately, restrictions were reduced and Wyoming returned to business almost as usual.

Even when they fall short of popular opinion, public health decisions are made with the best intentions based on the best information available at the time. The Wyoming Medical Society (WMS) will remain steadfast in our commitment

to protecting these decisions from political pressures. There is a time and place for everything. In times of public health emergencies, it is our physicians and specially trained healthcare providers who should be leading the conversations, not politicians. This won’t be the last time you hear WMS make the plea to all stand together to insulate public health from politics. We will ask you to protect it like your life depends on it.

Science cannot and should not be based on constituent recommendations and pressure, because science doesn’t care how anyone feels about it. Public opinion will never change lab results, infection rates or any other data. When time is of the essence, we need to ensure our public health officer, who has the appropriate education, training and expertise, has the ability to act quickly to protect our citizens. We must entrust the process with the understanding no decisions are made lightly, but ALL decisions are made to ensure the safety and well-being of Wyoming. 

**COVID-19 continues to threaten patients with chronic conditions.**

**Mountain-Pacific Quality Health has resources to support disease management.**

Visit <http://bit.ly/chronictools> for tools and resources.

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