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August XX, 2023

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CDC's Mask Guidance Was Quietly Called Out by Pro-Mask Academic During Pandemic

Public health agency largely ignored scientific integrity concerns of researcher

(Washington, DC) – The Functional Government Initiative (FGI) has obtained documents from the National Institutes of Health further detailing the extent to which public health officials promoted preferred policy objectives during the pandemic even in the face of contrary scientific evidence. According to the documents received through a Freedom of Information Act request, the public health officials misrepresented medical research and studies they cited supporting their narrative that masking prevented spreading COVID-19. When confronted, little changed.

Early in the pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) jointly created the COVID-19 Real-Time Learning Network [website](#), a platform purported to share “accurate, timely information about COVID-19.” In November 2021, Dr. Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, penned an official letter with several colleagues to Dr. Asiya Seema Chida, then medical editor for the website, pointing out that both the website and the CDC’s [guidance](#) on masks currently contained incorrect, harmful advice for the American public. FGI can find no evidence that this letter had been made public until released via one of FGI’s FOIA requests under litigation.

In the letter, Dr. Osterholm and his colleagues warned the CDC that promotion of these flawed data would “not only damage the credibility of science and endanger public trust by misrepresenting the evidence, but also provide false expectations in terms of respiratory protection to the public.” He went on to recommend the officials “reconsider [their] statements about the efficacy of masks and face coverings for preventing transmission of SARS-CoV-2.” Osterholm identified a pattern of cherry-picking studies based on their alignment with the administration’s policy agenda, saying, “Studies that do not support its perspective are similarly downplayed.”

Shortly after the letter, IDSA and the CDC’s modified websites appeared to ignore Dr. Osterholm’s concerns, doubling down on claims that “[any mask is better than no mask](#)” that continue today and affirming the respected researchers’ claims that the officials were guilty of cherry-picking research that fit their policy agenda.

Peter McGinnis, spokesman for FGI, issued the following statement:



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“The story of official masking guidance should trouble the American public. Recall that Dr. Fauci at first said there was no need for masks. Then cloth masks were all that stood between you and COVID. But as evidence against cloth masks appeared, the premiere scientific health organizations dug in their heels and refused to follow the science or listen to their trusted outside advisors. That Dr. Osterholm and his colleagues felt compelled to raise concerns about cherry-picked data and the danger it presented to the credibility of public health officials and the health of the public says that something was deeply dysfunctional in these agencies.”

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