In a span of 72 hours, the Cleveland Clinic has fallen from being regarded as one of the top medical institutions in the country to a near 'trending topic' on twitter (and the hashtags are not good.)

At the center of the backlash is a blog post written by the medical director and chief operating officer of the Cleveland Clinic Wellness Institute, Dr. Daniel Neides. The details of the post have been described, and appropriately challenged, in full detail by our own Dr. Josh Bloom in his article, The Fool at The Cleveland Clinic. [1]

In essence, the blog post was a bunch of anti-science quackery as Dr. Neides opined on toxins, chemicals and food.

But, what caught people's attention were not the ignorant comments about chemicals in the environment - it was his opinions on vaccines. The completely justified public evisceration of Dr. Neides shows that over the past (almost) 20 years, that one issue has evolved into THE scientific issue that draws a line in the sand.

Although almost everything else that he said in the blog post is wrong - spewing nonsense about toxins and chemicals does not warrant the same reaction.
We, as scientists and physicians, can buy organic apples if we want to, shop at Whole Foods if we happen to be near one, or buy the nail polish with no toluene if we so choose. Do any of those choices make scientific sense? No. But, doing those things is not the same as not vaccinating, or verbally equating vaccines and autism. Because, at this point in the debate, propagating that link is reserved for exactly two people - the lying ex-physician, Andrew Wakefield, who made the vaccine-autism link up to make an easy buck and a particularly ignorant former playboy bunny. Everyone else should be on board with vaccination. There are no more excuses.

The Cleveland Clinic is obviously mortified that their physician wrote this blog post (and that no one read it before it went up.) They have issued as strong of a rebuke as they possibly could without firing him on the spot. The full whiplashing [2] by the Cleveland Clinic is as follows:

“Cleveland Clinic is fully committed to evidence-based medicine. Harmful myths and untruths about vaccinations have been scientifically debunked in rigorous ways. We completely support vaccinations to protect people, especially children who are particularly vulnerable. Our physician published his statement without authorization from Cleveland Clinic. His views do not reflect the position of Cleveland Clinic and appropriate disciplinary action will be taken.”

And, Dr. Neides himself released a statement, through the Cleveland Clinic, stating that

"I apologize and regret publishing a blog that has caused so much concern and confusion for the public and medical community. I fully support vaccinations and my concern was meant to be positive around the safety of them."

Honestly, Dr. Neides's weak attempt at, all of a sudden, siding with science is like Anthony Weiner saying that he was just trying to raise awareness of how easy it is to add a photo to a text.

Because of his doubt in the efficacy of vaccines, and the failure to debunk the false link between vaccines and autism, he has become (overnight) officially disrespected by the community and, hopefully, will be reprimanded by the Cleveland Clinic.

In doubting science and siding with a conspiracy theory, he has put himself on the other side of the line. One where people die of preventable diseases like measles and influenza.

The only silver lining to this is the firestorm that kicked up around him and the quick retraction of his words. But, as the anti-vaxx movement have proven, retracting something does not always lessen its impact. Andrew Wakefield's original Lancet article was retracted in 2010, and people like Dr. Neides are still propagating that myth. He must be hoping, after this past weekend, that his own retraction of his ignorant blog post will be a bit more effective in making it go away.
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