

Jessica Chastain, Please Don't Use Doctors In Your Political War



By Jamie Wells, M.D. — October 5, 2017



Credit: Wikipedia [1]

I get it. Actress Jessica Chastain hates guns. But, Ms. Chastain, please don't use your platform to spread untruths about the medical profession to make a political point. When you have nearly 600,000 twitter followers, the damage is done even if you inevitably delete your tweet. Which you did.

Clearly, after the tragic events this week in Las Vegas, emotions are high and discussions around gun violence are going to happen. That's fine. However, making inaccurate statements about medical testing does not advance any gun control argument and serves to do potential harm.

After much online criticism today, Ms. Chastain deleted the following tweet without explanation - fellow actor James Woods had re-tweeted it:



James Woods ✓ @RealJamesWoods · 24 min

So this knowledge was gained from a movie script? That explains it.

Jessica Chastain ✓ @jes_chastain

Welcome to America, where you'll wait 6 months for an X-ray but hey, you can buy an AR-15 in 5 minutes flat.

- @MissSloaneMovie

Celebrities are in a wonderful, privileged position. They can shine a spotlight on injustices and rare diseases that otherwise would garner little attention (see my pieces about [Jack Black](#) [2], [Ed Sheeran](#) [3] and [President Trump](#) [4] doing just that). They can significantly move the needle in shifting resources and bringing focus onto so many deserving issues in the medical realm. It is a powerful thing that celebrities are so engaged and desire to use their voice.

But you can be against something political without conflating the issue. In this instance, the problematic portion of the tweet is about x-rays and the state of medicine in the United States. So I'll talk specifically about what is in error: the first part of her now-deleted Tweet which read "Welcome to America, where you'll wait 6 months for an X-ray."

This is inaccurate on many levels. For one, x-rays are often an urgent test needed for acute or subacute injury or symptoms, so obtaining them 6 months later would prove useless and do a patient a disservice. In scenarios where there is a more chronic etiology like assessing a bone age or determining if there is progression of scoliosis in a teenager over spans of time, the x-rays are still ordered and achieved expeditiously.

It does not take months in America to order or receive one.

Preserving this ability is at the core of a lot of uproar over Obamacare. Health systems that are government-controlled, like [Canada and the UK](#) [5], are consistently in the news for ever-expanding wait times. If we do shift toward a universal healthcare public system, then wait times will become more of an American problem.

Wait times take physical, financial and emotional tolls. Many of us do debate whether health care can be "saved" if access continues to be prized over affordable quality care. To review recent data on these issues, please read [How Much Worse Can It Get For NHS? Chief Inspector Says 'Not Fit For 21st Century'](#) [6] where I discuss NHS England and the fact that the number of people waiting for routine surgery exceeds 4 million. To review the impact of that and appreciate the adverse effect on patient safety, click [here](#) [7].

Debates are a hallmark of American greatness and I applaud celebrities who care enough to use their voice to promote messages they care about that reflect varying and all points-of-view. Gun violence and mental health is an important conversation to have, too important to cloud

unnecessarily with imprecise medical information.

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Links

[1] [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jessica_Chastain_TIFF_2013_\(2\)_cropped.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jessica_Chastain_TIFF_2013_(2)_cropped.jpg)

[2] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/04/28/dear-hollywood-jack-black-shows-how-health-outreach-more-environmental-psas-11204>

[3] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/05/04/well-done-ed-sheeran-keep-spotlight-rare-disease-11233>

[4] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/03/02/did-pompe-disease-get-new-champion-president-trump-10930>

[5] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/08/28/canadian-health-system-uk-stretched-max-capacity-11753>

[6] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/10/03/how-much-worse-can-it-get-nhs-chief-inspector-says-%E2%80%98not-fit-21st-century%E2%80%99-11909>

[7] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/08/11/rough-week-government-run-healthcare-11682>