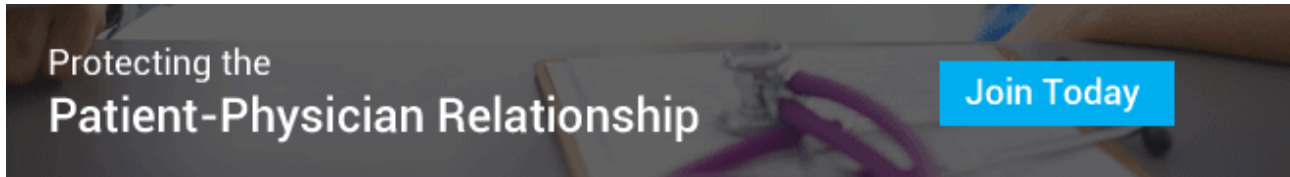


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Big Tech Silencing Physicians: A Very Dangerous Road for American Medicine

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By Lionel Lee, DO, FACOEP

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press...”

The Constitution plainly and clearly states the importance of allowing every American, including physicians, to speak freely without concern for censorship. By now, most of the medical community has seen the recent press conference and videos posted all over social media by the group called America’s Frontline Physicians. The videos garnered nearly 20 million views all within a few hours, before being removed by Big Tech for “violation of community standards.” The irony is that these physicians were speaking on the steps of our Supreme Court before Big Tech stepped on their ability to meaningfully exercise their First Amendment rights. Why did Big Tech work so fast and furiously to remove these videos in the name of “violation of community standards”? The question I have is, what standards and which community?

When we have large and influential social media groups removing free speech and honest medical opinion, this creates an entirely new aspect to medicine. Particularly when the message being shared by this group has real data to support their stance regarding COVID treatment. An outright silencing of doctors that every physician and physician college should be deeply concerned with and quite honestly, angry – angry that physicians are not allowed to express their genuine medical views. In addition, we need to be concerned that physicians are not allowed to express their medical opinions that may help patients during this worldwide pandemic. It would appear now that we are allowing social media tech giants to practice medicine, instead of keeping this sacred relationship between the doctor and patient.

This is not a left versus right matter, or a Republican versus Democrat issue. This is an American issue and the issue is outright censorship. When did our social media platforms operate like the Chinese Communist Party? My appeal to my physician colleagues is that our country needs us more than ever to speak up and not be silenced. You may not agree with the message that hydroxychloroquine is the right treatment for COVID. However, the principle we should agree on is that silencing doctors because the message does not fit with a certain narrative is an injustice to our profession and the Constitution.

Being a physician is a blessing and a calling, the highest calling where patients are allowing us and entrusting us with their very lives. But when we allow and condone censorship, this creates a very dangerous road for our profession. Basically, we are allowing non physicians to dictate the information in our profession and suppress diverse

medical opinions.

Our patients need physicians to speak up and not be silenced. It is through dissent and free discussion that physicians are able to make progress in medicine. This open and intelligent discussion allows for better understanding and improves our art and science. Some of the greatest medical treatments and therapies were founded on challenging conventional wisdom. Imagine if social media platforms were to have operated throughout history. Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis would be silenced for advocating handwashing in the OB room, Dr. Bennet Omalu would never be known for his work in sports head injuries, or more recently, Dr. Cameron Kyle-Sidell's seminal video would have been lost with regards to early intubation and COVID care.

Free speech is so fundamental to our country and to our profession. A necessary corollary of that principle is that we must be allowed to have free and honest discussions, without fear of censorship. Today they silenced a group of doctors who were willing to speak out. But tomorrow, it may be your voice that will be silenced when you are speaking out for your patients.

Dr Lionel Lee is a board certified emergency medicine physician and currently lives in Arizona.

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