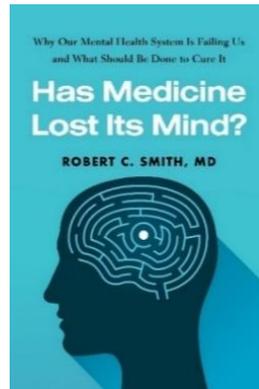


## *HAS MEDICINE LOST ITS MIND?*



Newsletter 23: The Public's Health

January 2025

Dear (name),

I have tried to avoid politics in these newsletters, but I can't when political actions directly impair patients' care.

I may be biased about today's topic of preventing epidemics because I had (nonparalytic) polio at age 14 years. I remember getting a spinal tap, being hospitalized, and then being isolated, away from friends and family and unable to play football. But even years before this, I developed a deep fear of ending up in an "iron lung," as those steel respirators used to help paralyzed children breathe were called. We all grew up fearing the swimming pool and large crowds.

It's against this backdrop that I note from the [NY Times](#) what I had feared for most of this last year. Kirk Milhoan, MD, a pediatric cardiologist who is chair of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, said "shots against polio and measles – and perhaps all diseases – should be optional, offered only in consultation with a clinician."

Dr. Milhoan goes on to say, that he did have "concerns" that some children might die of measles or become paralyzed with polio because of a choice not to vaccinate. But he countered with a dispassionate, "I also am saddened when people die of alcoholic diseases. Freedom of choice (has) bad health outcomes."

Perhaps he believes that all but a few would select prevention even if not required. But what about the infants and children who are too young to choose wisely or the immunosuppressed and older patients where their own preventive efforts might not take hold when faced with now millions of (unnecessarily) infected people. Dr. Milhoan defended himself with the idea that requiring preventive measures was "medical battery" and that required preventive practices flouted choice and informed consent. But that hardly equates with the medical battery imposed on society who will suffer an otherwise preventable epidemic. In another stretch, he says his new policy will help establish public trust. What are the data we lack

trust? Public health measures have eradicated polio, smallpox, measles, and dozens of other previously fatal diseases.

Dr. Milhoan's callous attitude echoes what we often hear elsewhere in today's political atmosphere. Just one other example, among many, is Senator Joni Ernst (Republican, Iowa). When queried about the adverse impact on thousands of Iowans from losing Medicaid, Ernst combatively replied, "We're all going to die."

I can't believe that these are simply bad people or that they even believe what they are saying and doing. What has overcome their evolutionary advantage of a large left brain? Who would wittingly foster a repeat of the old epidemics that killed tens of millions or jeopardize the health care of tens of thousands of Iowans?

They're not demented. So, what motivates such harmful behavior? A bizarre interpretation of free will that overrides the common good. A quest for power and/or money. Fear of a misguided leader. Cult-like brainwashing. Poor education on prevention. Etc.

Whatever the cause, it has us in a full blown crisis. We need definitive action now to rid our patients—and society—of such depraved people.

Take care.

Bob

**PS1**—If you want to **help in Minnesota**: [Where to donate, volunteer in Minnesota and beyond to resist ICE | Vox](https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/476621/how-to-help-minnesota-protests-ice-volunteer-donate); <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/476621/how-to-help-minnesota-protests-ice-volunteer-donate> (to send to others on Twitter/X, copy this exact address)

**PS2**—If you believe medicine must provide better mental and physical health care, *please help us spark this conversation. Forward this email to a friend, colleague, or journalist who cares about health care's future, or share the Has Medicine Lost Its Mind? link (below) on your social media with a note about why it matters to you. And tag me too @robertcsmithmd. You can find everything at: <https://www.robertcsmithmd.com>*

**PS3**—It's cold and snowy out here, but the swans and geese don't mind.

