

Loss of Faith in Public Health Recommendations

Joel L. Nitzkin, MD 8/13/2022 AAPHP Virtual Meeting

Introduction:

Public health has taken a beating these past three years because of a combination of political polarization dramatically increasing distrust of government and perceived mismanagement and inept communication by federal authorities relative to the COVID pandemic. Recovery of the public health infrastructure will require an understanding of what has happened, and why. It will also require a re-thinking of how we communicate with political leaders and the general public.

Issues to be addressed:

1. Setting the Stage (principles articulated in the Preventive Services ToolKit ((PSTK)) Curriculum)
 - a. Science and Technology: Role of the Physician
 - b. Management: Translation of Words to Action:
 - c. "Politics" Friends, Enemies, and Deeply Held Beliefs
2. Risk-related Communication (principles articulated by Peter Sandman – www.psandman.com)
 - a. Risk = Hazard + Outrage
 - i. Management of hazard
 - ii. Management of outrage
 - iii. Feedback and transition over time
 - b. Prerequisites:
 - i. Honesty
 - ii. Credibility
 - iii. Technical Competence (Science, Management, Politics)
 - iv. Uncertainty
 - c. Selected Principles of Risk Communication
 - i. Clarity and Simplicity
 1. Recommendations
 2. Why and How
 - ii. Acknowledge uncertainty and diversity of opinion
 - iii. Acknowledge and address barriers to compliance
 - iv. Err on the alarming side
 - v. Reassure, but don't overdo reassurance – tell people what to expect
 - vi. Let people choose their own actions
 - vii. Be careful with risk comparisons
3. Recommendations to Health Officials:
 - a. Think through all pertinent domains
 - b. Seek guidance and support of others to enhance compliance and set the stage for follow-up communications
 - c. Learn from experience – yours and others