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Menacing Assaults on Science Causing Alarming and Avoidable Deaths in the U.S.

*FAU Schmidt College of Medicine Researchers Publish
Commentary on COVID-19 in 'EClinicalMedicine' by 'Lancet'*

October 12, 2020 – COVID-19 is now the third leading cause of death in the United States only behind cardiovascular disease and cancer. The U.S. accounts for more than 20 percent of COVID-19 cases (more than 7.7 million) and deaths (more than 210,000) in the world today while comprising 4.25 percent of the global population.

In a commentary published online in *EClinicalMedicine* by Lancet, researchers from Florida Atlantic University's Schmidt College of Medicine and collaborators state that "pandemic politics" is causing assaults on science, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as well as the health of the public.

As an example, the authors point out that the FDA, a world renowned regulatory authority issued an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for hydroxychloroquine in the absence of any reliable data from large-scale randomized trials, all of which later showed no benefit and some showed clear harm. According to the authors, what is even more disturbing is the escalation of the politicization of the CDC, formerly a role model for disease control and prevention activities worldwide. They state that during COVID-19, the CDC issued reopening guidelines after initial lockdowns that lasted only until the epidemic curve flattened, violating their own principles to continue until cases and deaths drastically fell. On Aug. 25, the CDC apparently updated guidelines excluding exposed but asymptomatic individuals from testing. Then, on Sept. 17, it was revealed that White House officials edited and published guidelines despite CDC objections.

Finally, with respect to the health of the U.S. public, the authors note that while the president of the United States publicly issued repeated denials while calling the pandemic a "hoax," he privately stated in a recorded interview that COVID-19 "was more deadly than even your strenuous flu."

"Unfortunately and tragically, the U.S. had been judged in early 2016 to have been best prepared for the existential threat of a pandemic, but turned out to be the least prepared for the actual threat in early 2020," said Scott M. Alter, M.D., M.B.A., first author, an emergency medicine physician, and an assistant professor in the Department of Integrated Medical Sciences in FAU's Schmidt College of Medicine.

The authors also state that the politicization of the FDA and CDC is producing continued losses of trust by the U.S. public as well as continued harm to their longstanding reputations of

respect and admiration worldwide.

“The anticipated number of deaths from COVID-19 may become comparable to the most lethal epidemic of influenza in U.S. history, which occurred from 1918 to 1919 when approximately 675,000 Americans died,” said Charles H. Hennekens, M.D., Dr.PH, senior author, first Sir Richard Doll Professor and senior academic advisor in FAU’s Schmidt College of Medicine. “In stark contrast to both the current U.S. epidemic of COVID-19 and the Spanish Flu of 1918-19, the 2018-19 flu season affected about 42.9 million Americans, of which about 61,200 died.”

Hennekens added, “As competent and compassionate healthcare professionals, we must redouble efforts to combat pandemic politics and promote evidence-based clinical and public health practices and discovery research.”

The authors underscore that the U.S. has become and will very likely remain the epicenter of the pandemic worldwide. They say that if the past is prologue then pandemic politics concerning vaccine development will potentially lead to another premature EUA by the FDA in the absence of reliable evidence. They further state that it is more imperative than ever that the U.S. abandon pandemic politics and focus solely on effective public health strategies.

“In the U.S., there is an urgent need for a unified national approach for the implementation of effective public health mitigation strategies, predominantly social distancing, masking, avoidance of crowds, as well as frequent hand and face washing,” said Alter.

Co-authors of the commentary are Suzanne LeBlang, M.D., an affiliate associate professor of integrated medical sciences, FAU’s Schmidt College of Medicine; Richard D. Shih, M.D., a professor of integrated medical sciences and division director of emergency medicine, FAU’s Schmidt College of Medicine; and Dennis G. Maki, M.D., a professor of medicine and an internationally renowned infectious disease clinician and epidemiologist from the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, who served with Hennekens for two

years as lieutenant commanders in the U.S. Public Health Service as epidemic intelligence service officers with the CDC.

About the Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine:

FAU's Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine is one of approximately 155 accredited medical schools in the U.S. The college was launched in 2010, when the Florida Board of Governors made a landmark decision authorizing FAU to award the M.D. degree. After receiving approval from the Florida legislature and the governor, it became the 134th allopathic medical school in North America. With more than 70 full and part-time faculty and more than 1,300 affiliate faculty, the college matriculates 64 medical students each year and has been nationally recognized for its innovative curriculum. To further FAU's commitment to increase much needed medical residency positions in Palm Beach County and to ensure that the region will continue to have an adequate and well-trained physician workforce, the FAU Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine Consortium for Graduate Medical Education (GME) was formed in fall 2011 with five leading hospitals in Palm Beach County. The Consortium currently has five Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) accredited residencies including internal medicine, surgery, emergency medicine, psychiatry, and neurology.

About Florida Atlantic University:

Florida Atlantic University, established in 1961, officially opened its doors in 1964 as the fifth public university in Florida. Today, the University, with an annual economic impact of \$6.3 billion, serves more than 30,000 undergraduate and graduate students at sites throughout its six-county service region in southeast Florida. FAU's world-class teaching and research faculty serves students through 10 colleges: the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters, the College of Business, the College for Design and Social Inquiry, the College of Education, the College of Engineering and Computer Science, the Graduate College, the Harriet L. Wilkes Honors

College, the Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine, the Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing and the Charles E. Schmidt College of Science. FAU is ranked as a High Research Activity institution by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The University is placing special focus on the rapid development of critical areas that form the basis of its strategic plan: Healthy aging, biotech, coastal and marine issues, neuroscience, regenerative medicine, informatics, lifespan and the environment. These areas provide opportunities for faculty and students to build upon FAU's existing strengths in research and scholarship. For more

information, visit fau.edu.

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