

## **A response to statements regarding COVID-19 made by Professor Dolores Cahill**

To our peers and our professors,

We are a group of students in the School of Medicine at University College Dublin who are concerned by the recent opinions regarding COVID-19 shared by Professor Dolores Cahill in interviews with Computing Forever and subsequently. Her public statements are inconsistent with current science and epidemiology regarding COVID-19.<sup>1,2,3</sup> It appears she is sharing biased, non peer reviewed data with low methodological quality which, when interpreted by the public as medical advice could endanger their own and public health. During these interviews she uses her scientific accolades to assert authority on statements, citing her current position in UCD School of Medicine and her UCD research profile as indication that she is a trustworthy scientific source.

Some examples of statements made by Professor Cahill which contradict advice and guidelines by the WHO and HSE include:

"I would definitively say, for coronavirus, there is no need for masks and also there is no need for social distancing."

[In reference to Coronavirus] "you could actually prevent [...] having serious complications or side effects with vitamins and zinc. And [...] the prevention strategies of hydroxychloroquine and zinc [...] there need to be no unnecessary deaths."

"End the lockdown and no phasing."

For a list of further incendiary statements made by Professor Cahill please see the attached document. The claims made by Professor Cahill have been shared globally, translated into different languages and distributed, uncorrected and unchallenged, on international news channels, radio shows, and in other forms of media. This misinformation concerns our international community and global public health.

We live in a time when misinformation spreads like viruses online, through social media, alternative news sources, and the mainstream media.<sup>4</sup> Content on websites and online communities is largely unregulated, and places the burden on consumers to determine the reliability of information.<sup>5</sup> There is a growing mistrust in healthcare institutions, in science, and in the counsel of experts whose lives are dedicated to evidence and reason. Physicians, nurses, researchers, and public health experts around the world are working tirelessly to contain this pandemic, to develop new tests, to develop treatments, and to create a vaccine. As future healthcare providers and community members, it is vital that we acknowledge and unequivocally condemn the intentional spread of misinformation.

In becoming physicians, we will have immense power that reaches beyond individual patient encounters. We will be members of one of the world's most-trusted professions. We are trusted because we do not act on opinions or hunches. We take an oath to be ethical, practicing medicine around a set of established standards and principles. Our responsibility to ensure information or advice is factually accurate, evidence-based, and not misleading is repeatedly addressed in the Irish Medical Council Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics for Registered Medical Practitioners.<sup>6</sup> Despite solid evidence behind the public health measures now in place, misinformation about COVID-19 is spreading rapidly, often due to fear or political agendas. These rumours and conspiracy theories may contribute to more illness, more suffering, and more deaths. We must question

statements that negatively impact the health of our communities - including the continued spread of misinformation which may lead to the distrust of healthcare professionals.

The University's lack of statement or action regarding Professor Cahill's recent statements concerns us as the future generation of healthcare providers, scientists, and researchers. We urge the university to:

- Consider how Professor Cahill's actions reflect on the University and its reputation.
- Consider the standard of education paid for and expected by the future healthcare professionals, researchers, and scientists.
- Consider how the university's lack of any statement disavowing Professor Cahill's statements acts as a silent endorsement.

UCD is a research university, globally recognized for its excellence in teaching and learning. This is the reason many Irish, European and International students chose to attend UCD for our medical degree. We urge the university to consider their ethical responsibility to our community and to the public's health.

We are future physicians, but right now our classmates are working in hospitals around Ireland and the globe as nurses, laboratory staff, phlebotomists, radiography technicians, pharmacists, in administrative roles, and in research positions. Our classmates are cleaning healthcare facilities, delivering meals and medications to our most vulnerable community members, caring for our children and elderly family members, and taking the necessary steps to keep ourselves and our loved ones safe, while also completing all required coursework to finish the spring trimester. We are committed to evidence-based actions to fight COVID-19. The statements made by Professor Cahill are something we take seriously, both personally and professionally.

Les meas,

133 UCD School of Medicine students

This letter has been signed in solidarity by 2 UCD students outside the School of Medicine and 2 recent UCD School of Medicine alumni.

1. Jaruzel E. We Really Need to Talk About That Dolores Cahill COVID-19 Video. 19 May 2020.
2. Alexander PE, Debono VB, Mammen MJ, Iorio A, Aryal K, Deng D, Brocard E, Alhazzani W. COVID-19 coronavirus research has overall low methodological quality thus far: case in point for chloroquine/hydroxychloroquine. [published online ahead of print, 2020 Apr 21]. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*. 2020; S0895-4356(20)30371-1.
3. Teoh F. Computing Forever interview with Dolores Cahill contains numerous inaccuracies about COVID-19 and vaccines [Internet]. *Health Feedback*. 2020. Available from: <https://healthfeedback.org/computing-forever-interview-with-dolores-cahill-contains-numerous-inaccuracies-about-covid-19-and-vaccines/>
4. Challenor L. Dealing with fake health information during the coronavirus pandemic. *HSE.ie*. 20 April 2020. [viewed 1 June, 2020]
5. Wu JT, McCormick JB. Why Health Professionals Should Speak Out Against False Beliefs on the Internet. *AMA Journal of Ethics*. 2018;20(11):E1052-1058.

6. Comhairle na nDochtúirí Leighis Medical Council. Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics for Registered Medical Practitioners (Amended) 8th Edition. 2019.