

End of HHS COVID-19 hospital death reporting prompts outrage from public and scientists

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21 January 2022

Last Friday, Dr. Jorge A. Caballero reported on Twitter that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) had published guidelines which would end the requirement for hospitals to report daily in-hospital COVID-19 deaths to the federal department.

Dr. Caballero reported that the figures from the HHS are “*the only* source of real-time death counts for every U.S. hospital.” While the new guidelines only go into effect on February 2, Caballero and others warned that some hospitals had already begun to end daily death reporting to the federal government.

The statement was retweeted nearly 3,000 times, and a tweet by this author reporting the HHS’s actions was retweeted 11,700 times and viewed by more than 6 million people.

The thousands of people sharing and commenting on these tweets expressed shock and anger, condemning what they saw as a cover-up by the Biden administration, reminiscent of the deliberate suppression of science under Trump.

Representative comments include:

- “They just don’t care if we die.”
- “They don’t want us to know how badly they are failing.”
- “This is the sort of ‘sweep it under the rug’ stuff we expected from a second Trump administration.”
- “Trump-tier stupidity if true.”
- “Oh man I love the hit film ‘Don’t look up’ If we simply close our eyes and say ‘lalalala’ the problem will go away!”

In the ensuing week, not a single publication besides the *World Socialist Web Site* reported on the moves by the HHS, even though, in a reply to Dr. Caballero, a spokesperson for the department effectively confirmed

the doctor’s central claim.

The only other reporting of the story came from Business Insider, which claimed that warnings about the ending of death reporting were “misleading,” despite admitting the central argument, that the HHS was ending hospital data reporting, was true.

Business Insider claimed that the ending of daily reporting by hospitals to the HHS was largely meaningless because the same data would be reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) via state health departments, while ignoring the fact that state reporting of COVID-19 data is also under attack.

Despite the lack of interest in the mainstream media, scientists are demanding to know why hospitals are being allowed to shut down a major source of information about COVID-19 deaths.

“I believe this is a true scandal,” said Dr. William Ku, a data scientist and previously a senior lecturer and researcher at Columbia University and MIT, in a Twitter post.

He subsequently added, “There is no substitute for timely, accurate, and standardized reporting. This is Data Science 101.”

Asked by the WSWs whether the data from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) was simply duplicative of data compiled by the Centers for Disease Control by the states, Ku replied, “HHS death data was more timely than CDC death data for the most recent seven days because CDC allows many states to report them late.

“Moreover, the HHS data is more uniformly reported than the CDC data, so adding FL, CA, NY, and TX, for example, is more meaningful to get the US total when

they all report the same way. The CDC has not enforced uniform reporting as rigorously so the total US is less accurate than the HHS data.

“I found cases, hospital admits/day and deaths are extremely well correlated, and I use the data to forecast COVID-19 deaths 2-4 weeks out. Without timely data, this forecast would be less accurate for up to 8 weeks.”

Dr. Ku concluded, “The whole reason for CDC’s existence is to constantly survey the health situation and be able to catch pandemics before they start or at the latest as soon as they start.”

The announcement by the HHS comes as deaths from COVID-19 are surging, with the *New York Times* COVID-19 tracker reporting that 2,700 people died from COVID-19 on Wednesday. Figures published earlier this month by the CDC indicated that the daily death toll will reach 3,500 by the end of the month.

On January 16, Business Insider, the same publication that disputed the significance of the HHS ending death reporting, reported, “A week after the CDC’s announcement on December 23, the total number of hospitalized patients who contracted COVID-19 at least two weeks into their hospital stay went up 80%—from around 1,200 to 2,200 patients—according to HHS data.”

It concluded, “Four nurses across the US told Insider they had been told to come into work while sick or risk losing pay.”

Responding to Mark D. Levine, the Borough President of Manhattan, Dr. Caballero posted a chart showing that the number of hospitals in New York state reporting COVID-19 deaths to the HHS had fallen by half.

Dr. Caballero wrote, “I urge you to demand that all hospitals in NYC report the number of COVID-19 deaths on a daily basis. HHS data strongly suggests that the number of in-hospital deaths is skyrocketing.”

Just days later, the *New York Post* reported that New York hospitals are “overrun with bodies.”

“The whole hospital system is at capacity with patients and, of course, that includes the morgues,” a source told the *Post*.

At the same time that federal COVID-19 reporting is being severely limited, health departments at the state level, which report to the CDC, are themselves shutting down daily data reporting.

On January 14, Pew Research published an article

entitled “A Shift Away from Daily COVID Case Counts Has Begun.”

It noted that “Florida, Iowa and Nebraska moved to weekly counts last summer, as COVID-19 cases waned nationwide. Alaska, Kansas and Michigan publish case data three times a week.”

Tennessee ended daily reporting last month, and Pew wrote that “experts expect other states to follow.”



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