



national

coronavirus

# Thirteen doctors under investigation after complaints about spread of Covid-19 misinformation ▶

Cate Broughton · 05:00, Jun 20 2021

RYAN ANDERSON/STUFF

Auckland University research fellow Kate Hannah tells you what to look for to identify misinformation about the Covid-19 virus and vaccine.

The Medical Council is investigating 13 doctors who may have given misinformation about Covid-19, with prominent experts warning those spreading misinformation should be prepared to lose their jobs.

The complaints follow an open letter by a group of doctors, health professionals and scientists who oppose the Covid-19 Pfizer vaccine. Among the signatories are 33 medical doctors, 100 nurses and 187 members of allied health professions.

Papakura GP and National Māori Pandemic Group, Whakakaupapa Urutā, co-leader Dr Rawiri Jansen said it was important people complained, and those found to have breached council's standards should be sacked.

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TOM LEE/STUFF

The complaints follow an open letter by a group of doctors, health professionals and scientists who oppose the Covid-19 Pfizer vaccine.

"It's really important that people report things, that it's investigated and taken seriously and if the investigation is going to take months that's disappointing but necessary. To every extent possible, they should speed it up and the people who are needing to defend themselves need to be given due process, but let's get it on, let's get this done."

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A Council spokeswoman said the council has received 26 complaints in 2021 "about doctors who may have provided misinformation about Covid-19", and 13 were being investigated. Doctors under investigation by the Medical Council could be struck off, if they were found to have spread misinformation .

ROBERT KITCHIN/STUFF

Dr Rawiri McKree Jansen, a co-leader of Te Rōpū Whakakaupapa Urutā in Wellington, said doctors found to have spread misinformation about Covid-19 should lose their registration and their jobs.

The council's statutory role under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 is to register doctors, issue practising certificates and review complaints. It has the power to suspend doctors if necessary.

After an investigation by a separate, independent professional misconduct committee, the council could refer a doctor to the Health Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal (HPDT). Investigations took nine months to complete, on average, the spokeswoman said.

University of Otago public health expert Michael Baker said doctors had a duty to look at the best evidence and guidelines.

Professor Michael Baker, Otago University, said the spread of misinformation by health professionals was very concerning.

“I mean if you were a surgeon, and you thought 'I'm not going to do best surgical practice, I'm not going to look at the science, I'm just going to do it my way', you would not be a surgeon any more. But it seems like a basic life-saving intervention like immunisation, we tolerate people who say 'I don't believe in immunisation...’

“Misinformation kills, we know that.”

Jansen said the number of doctors involved in misinformation was "overwhelmingly small" but their influence was great.

“That one person who has had that experience is going to be talking with multiple other people, so it is a concern for many more people, not just the person who was exposed from the health professional.”

Jansen, who is also clinical director for the National Hauora Coalition of 55 kaupapa Māori medical practices, said general practice managers and public health organisations had an obligation to act when they became aware of a doctor who held views that could not be well-supported by evidence.

He had not had any concerns raised about doctors employed by the coalition.

Jansen said misinformation was among many potential barriers to the success of the vaccination programme for Māori, but not the greatest.

He said Māori should have been prioritised for access to the vaccination in recognition of their greater vulnerability to more severe consequences of a Covid-19 infection.

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