

Science Denial Is Harming Oregon

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PRESENTATION FORMAT: 15 minute oral presentation

TOPIC/TARGET AUDIENCE: All Public Health Advocates

ABSTRACT: Despite settled science with overwhelming professional consensus citizen opposition prevents rational vaccination and fluoridation policies. Lessons from cognitive scientists studying climate change denial are directly applicable to the challenge facing public health advocates. Vaccination and fluoridation often conflict with deeply held self defining beliefs and political values. Electoral political considerations amplify the impact energized minorities have on legislators of both major parties. The elements of pseudo-science thinking and logical fallacies supporting mistaken beliefs are discussed. The concept of a "gateway belief" and debunking techniques are explored as partial solutions to meet public health's educational and communication challenges.

Learning Objective(s): Attendees will have a clearer understanding of the very difficult challenges public health advocacy faces in achieving public acceptance of politically controversial programs. An understanding of the psychological, logical and cognitive underpinnings for denial should improve advocacy communications with both scientific information and value based elements.

OBJECTIVE(S): Attendees will have a clearer understanding of the very difficult challenges public health advocacy faces to achieve public acceptance of politically controversial programs. They will gain an understanding of the psychological, logical and cognitive underpinnings for science denial and how to improve advocacy communications with both scientific information and value based elements. Learners will be able to define gateway belief and list at least one example.

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