

Rebecca Lacque stands outside Enloe Medical Center's emergency room, where she says a physician showed her a video claiming that mask-wearing and social distancing are useless.

PHOTO BY ASHIAH SCHARAGA

asked if she and her daughter would be tested, and when he said *no*, they left.

Lacque's teenage daughter, Annalise, told the CN&R that it was "scary and mad-dening" to hear such claims coming from a doctor.

When Lacque got home, she filed a complaint with the hospital, which contacted her via phone and later replied with a letter assuring her that Enloe's chief of staff had been notified and would investigate the incident. She went elsewhere for testing a week later and found out both she and her daughter were negative.

The situation continued to make her feel uneasy, however. *How many people have sought care and been shown this video*, she wondered?

"It was surreal that I had a licensed medical clinician in front of me who is trying to tell me that masks, testing and distancing are useless," she said. "People listen to doctors."

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—and numerous studies—report that mask-wearing and social distancing are vital to combating the spread of the coronavirus, which has killed approximately 465,000 people in the United States, including roughly 44,000 Californians. In Butte County, as of this story's deadline, 10,343 people had tested positive for COVID and 148 had died. That's a local case fatality

Dr. Lamont Leavitt

PHOTO VIA ENLOE MEDICAL CENTER'S WEBSITE (ENLOE.ORG)



rate of 1.4 percent.

Enloe responded to the CN&R's request to interview Leavitt by providing a statement from Enloe CEO Mike Wiltermood saying that the hospital supports local, state and federal mandates to reduce spread of the virus. He was not aware of the complaint prior to being contacted by the CN&R.

During a phone interview, Wiltermood said that "regardless of people's personal opinions on debatable items," such as business and school shutdowns, COVID-19 needs to be taken seriously—people need to get vaccinated, wear masks and social distance.

Wiltermood told the CN&R that Enloe does not discuss individual disciplinary issues, but he noted that Leavitt is still a member of the Chico Emergency Physicians Medical Group, which Enloe contracts with for emergency services, and remains "in good standing." He would neither confirm nor deny what allegedly occurred, but added that he personally reached out to the head of the medical group and "made it clear ... this isn't appropriate material to be showing our patients."

"They've assured me that they've dealt with the matter and it won't happen again," Wiltermood said.

"Despite maybe a one-off video that was shared, our employees have been very courageous through this whole thing," he continued. "They take it very seriously, and we're doing the best job we can under difficult circumstances."

Wiltermood pointed to the hospital's vaccination rate as one example. Approximately 2,800 out of Enloe's 3,500 employees—80 percent of its staff—have received their first vaccine dose, he said.

Disinformation nation

In addition to expressing concern about the spread of propaganda locally, Lacque said the incident at Enloe is indicative of a larger societal issue—a deadly pandemic made deadlier because Americans turn to questionable sources.

Eleven months into the public health crisis, misinformation remains rampant, in some cases infiltrating health care establishments the public is taught to trust. There have been numerous high-profile instances of medical personnel spreading falsehoods since COVID-19 appeared in the United States.

Millions of people have watched a press conference put on by physicians from

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