

Trump admin is “destroying medical research,” Senate report finds

Senators also pressed the director on the future of the NIH, noting that it has been hamstrung by the ongoing chaos, putting upcoming grant funding at risk, too. Of the NIH’s 27 institutes and centers, Bhattacharya testified, “I think it’s 15” that are without a director. Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.), meanwhile, noted that more than half of the institutes are on track to lose all their voting advisory committee members by the end of the year—and grants cannot be approved without sign-off from these committees. Bhattacharya responded that they’re working on it.

Weasely answers on vaccines

In the course of the hearing, senators also tried to assess Bhattacharya’s loyalty to Kennedy’s dangerous anti-vaccine ideology, which includes the false and thoroughly debunked claim that vaccines cause autism.

Sanders asked Bhattacharya directly: “Do vaccines cause autism? Yes/no?”

“I do not believe that the measles vaccine causes autism,” Bhattacharya responded.

“No, uh-uh,” Sanders quickly interjected. “I didn’t ask [about] measles. Do vaccines cause autism?”

“I have not seen a study that suggests any single vaccine causes autism,” Bhattacharya responded.

But this, too, is an evasive answer. Note that he said “any single vaccine,” leaving open the possibility that he believes vaccines collectively or in some combination could cause autism. The measles vaccine, for instance, is given in combination with immunizations against mumps, rubella, and sometimes varicella (chickenpox).

It would also be false to suggest vaccines in combination are linked to autism; numerous studies have found no link between autism and vaccination generally. Still, this is a false idea that Kennedy and the like-minded anti-vaccine advocates he has installed into critical federal vaccine advisory roles are now pursuing.

Later in the hearing, Bhattacharya also indicated that when he said “I have not seen a study,” he was suggesting that it was because such studies have not been done—which is also false; routine childhood vaccines have been extensively studied for safety and efficacy.

“I’ve seen so many studies on measles vaccines and autism that established that there is no link,” [to autism], he said in an exchange with Hassan on the subject. “The other vaccines are less well studied.”

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