

Prominent CNN Doctor Concedes US Has Been ‘Overcounting’ COVID-19 Deaths

By Jack Phillips
January 18, 2023

A doctor who appeared prominently in the media during the pandemic acknowledged this week the United States is “overcounting” COVID-19 deaths and stressed the need for “transparent reporting” on the real numbers.

Leana Wen, a former Planned Parenthood director who now works for CNN and the Washington Post, told the channel that natural immunity and vaccinations have reduced severe COVID-19 cases since the start of the pandemic.

“Hospitals are still routinely testing everyone who’s getting admitted for COVID,” Wen, also a former director of the Baltimore City Health Department, said in response to a question about whether her statements could be “fodder for conspiracy theorists.”

“We’re seeing many people who are hospitalized with COVID, and I think it’s important to separate out who is being hospitalized because of it,” Wen added. “Because there are a lot of people who are still very concerned about their risk from COVID and we need to give them the most accurate data possible so that they can better gauge their risks. There are people still not resuming indoor dining or going to the gym or socializing. We have to give them the most accurate reporting as possible.”

In a [Washington Post opinion piece](#), Wen noted that current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data show that about 400 people are dying from the virus every day. She then asked a question that many others have asked over the past three years: “But are these Americans dying from COVID or with COVID?”

“Two infectious-disease experts I spoke with believe that the number of deaths attributed to COVID is far greater than the actual number of people dying from COVID,” she wrote. “Robin Dretler, an attending physician at Emory Decatur Hospital and the former president of Georgia’s chapter of Infectious Diseases Society of America, estimates that at his hospital, 90 percent of patients diagnosed with COVID are actually in the hospital for some other illness.”

Some patients have several concurrent infections, not just COVID-19.

“People who have very low white blood cell counts from chemotherapy might be admitted because of bacterial pneumonia or foot gangrene,” Dretler was quoted as saying. “They may also have COVID, but COVID is not the main reason why they’re so sick.”

‘With COVID’?

But if those patients die, the doctor said that COVID-19 may get added to their death certificates—meaning, they’re counted as a COVID-19 death. That’s despite COVID-19 not being the primary factor that caused the deaths.

Notably, several Northern California counties in mid-2021 changed how they counted COVID-19 deaths. In one county, the death figure dropped by 22 percent, while in another, 400 fewer deaths were reported following the changes.

Months before that, an article published by the Association of American Medical Colleges noted that counting COVID-19 deaths is “complicated” and provided an example. An elderly man in Atlanta was stricken with advanced cancer in early 2021, later contracting COVID-19 before ultimately passing away.

“Given his already fragile state, his condition quickly took a turn for the worse” and he later died, a doctor said. Despite having advanced cancer, medical officials listed his death as caused by COVID-19.

“While he was very weak and frail from his underlying cancer, his death was undoubtedly accelerated and precipitated by COVID-19,” Dr. Sara Auld told the association.

Following the publication of her Washington Post opinion piece, some conservatives and COVID-19 vaccine skeptics suggested Wen is behind the curve.

“A year ago, this was a conspiracy theory that would get you censored,” wrote prominent vaccine skeptic Robert Kennedy Jr. on Twitter on Monday. And California-based Epidemiologist Dr. Tracy Hoegn wrote Monday that it is “amazing how long it has taken the U.S. to accept this is a problem,” noting that Denmark in 2021 changed how they would distinguish those who died *with* COVID-19 and those who died *from* the virus.

“This is not just recently true. It’s been true for three years! We truly do not know how many actually died from COVID, which means that not even the [case fatality rate] is accurate,” wrote Jeffrey Tucker, the head of the Brownstone Institute and a columnist for The Epoch Times, wrote on Twitter.

The Epoch Times first reported on how COVID deaths are counted in April 2020, and in September 2020 on how CDC data showed 94 percent of COVID deaths had contributing health conditions.