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Mining for Voices: Reframing Hydraulic Fracturing as a Public Health Issue

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Chipkin, Benjamin and Saberi, Pouné, "Mining for Voices: Reframing Hydraulic Fracturing as a Public Health Issue" (2018). SKMC JeffMD Scholarly Inquiry, Phase 1, Project 1.

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SI PHR Abstract
December 10, 2018

Mining for Voices: Reframing Hydraulic Fracturing as a Public Health Issue

Introduction: Hydraulic fracturing extracts fossil fuels from rock formations by injecting chemicals underground.¹ While 80% of studies demonstrate risks or actual harms to health from fracking, Pennsylvania does not require chemical disclosures.^{1,2} Fracking accelerates climate change, a phenomenon linked to increases in health emergencies.³ With 1.6 million Pennsylvanians living within 1 mile of active oil or gas development sites, there is considerable risk.⁴ In 2012, Pennsylvania banned physicians from discussing health impacts of fracking, an order struck down in 2016.⁵ Following the gag order, deficits in physician knowledge and urgency may remain around fracking. Outlining a precautionary approach to fracking policy might alleviate these gaps.

Objective: We aim to develop new approaches to fracking as a public health issue, to increase understanding and engagement and drive policy changes.

Methods: Through a policy paper, a precautionary approach to fracking will be contextualized with another public health issue, marijuana-intoxicated driving. A qualitative review of 12 studies on marijuana and driving was conducted to provide a framework for precautionary fracking policies. This work is a partnership with Physicians for Social Responsibility.

Results: Examination of literature revealed inconclusive evidence for links between marijuana intoxication and impairment of driving-related function and for links between marijuana intoxication and motor vehicle crashes.^{6,7} Despite that, national policy cautions against marijuana-intoxicated driving. This will be applied to a policy paper outlining a precautionary approach to fracking.

Discussion: Our future paper will educate and engage physicians in public health concerns around fracking and drive the implementation of precautionary policy measures.

References:

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