

NIH Senior Scientist Risks Job and License in Fight Against COVID Vaccine Mandates



A senior bioethicist who heads a research team at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) is [taking the lead](#) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the debate over the ethics of COVID vaccine mandates.

[Dr. Matthew Memoli](#), director of the Laboratory of Infectious Diseases at NIH, will argue against [vaccine mandates](#) during a Dec. 1 live-streamed roundtable session, which will be open to the public.

“There’s a lot of debate within the NIH about whether [a vaccine mandate] is appropriate,” David Wendler, a senior NIH bioethicist in charge of planning the session, [told the WSJ](#). “It’s an important, hot topic.”

Memoli opposes mandates for the [COVID vaccines](#) authorized for

emergency use in the U.S. and has chosen not to be vaccinated. Like many others, Memoli sought a religious exemption from mandatory vaccine requirements imposed by health authorities in the District of Columbia, where he is licensed to practice medicine.

Memoli said he is willing to risk his job and his license for the right not to receive a COVID vaccine. During the scheduled roundtable early next month, he will make the case against mandates.

"I think the way we are using the vaccines is wrong," Memoli said in a July 30 email to [Dr. Anthony Fauci](#), director of the NIAID, and two of his lieutenants. Memoli called mandated vaccination "extraordinarily problematic."

Memoli [told the WSJ](#) one of Fauci's colleagues thanked him for his email. Memoli said he supports COVID vaccines for high-risk populations including the elderly and obese, but said, "blanket vaccination of people at low risk of severe illness could hamper the development of more-robust immunity gained across a population from infection."

Memoli, a 16-year veteran at the NIH was selected this month for a 2021 NIH director's award – a top recognition from the head of the agency, for his supervision of a national study into undiagnosed COVID cases early in the pandemic.

Memoli said his children have [received their childhood vaccines](#), and he will support the results of the ethics discussion regardless of the outcome.

"I do vaccine trials. I, in fact, help create vaccines," Memoli told the WSJ. "Part of my career is to share my expert opinions, right or wrong ... I mean, if they all end up saying I'm wrong, that's fine. I want to have the discussion."

Christine Grady, head of NIH's Clinical Center bioethics department and Fauci's wife, approved the Dec. 1 seminar – a

session called "Grand Rounds."

Grady said in an email she believes there is interest in the topic across the agency.

"Our hope is that the December Grand Rounds will be relevant to the debates that are going on around the country regarding vaccine mandates," an agency spokeswoman said on Grady's behalf.