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

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

Introduction: Hydraulic fracturing extracts fossil fuels from rock formations by injecting chemicals underground. While 80% of studies demonstrate risks or actual harms to health from fracking, Pennsylvania does not require chemical disclosures. Fracking accelerates climate change, a phenomenon linked to increases in health emergencies. With 1.6 million Pennsylvanians living within 1 mile of active oil or gas development sites, there is considerable risk. In 2012, Pennsylvania banned physicians from discussing health impacts of fracking, an order struck down in 2016. 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. 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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