

## Peer Review

# Review of: "Epistemic Humility vs. Credentialism: The Educational Paradox in Modern Healthcare"

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The manuscript titled *"Epistemic Humility vs. Credentialism: The Educational Paradox in Modern Healthcare"* explores the intersection of credentialism, personality traits (particularly narcissism), and susceptibility to misinformation, particularly within anti-vaccine movements. Drawing on existing literature, including Cosgrove and Murphy (2023), the author constructs a conceptual critique of how credentialed individuals—often outside their field of expertise—can weaponize academic authority to legitimize pseudoscientific claims. The paper offers a timely commentary on epistemic humility and its necessity in science communication, supported by illustrative case studies and theoretical framing rooted in cognitive psychology and public health. The central contribution lies in articulating the “educational paradox”: the idea that higher education, in the absence of humility, can sometimes exacerbate susceptibility to misinformation.

Despite its relevance and originality, the manuscript suffers from several theoretical, methodological, and interpretive limitations that warrant substantial revision.

The theoretical framing, while conceptually rich, often lacks precision in defining key constructs. “Credentialism,” “epistemic humility,” and “intellectual arrogance” are invoked throughout, but the distinctions between them are sometimes blurred. At times, credentialism appears to refer to the institutional overemphasis on degrees, while elsewhere it denotes the individual misuse of credentials. Similarly, the notion of “epistemic humility” is central but under-theorized. Although the commentary relies heavily on Cosgrove and Murphy (2023), it does not sufficiently engage with broader philosophical or psychological literature on humility, expertise, or metacognition. As a result, the argument remains descriptively compelling but conceptually narrow. Additionally, although narcissism is repeatedly cited as a compounding factor, its empirical measurement, variation (e.g., grandiose vs. vulnerable), and

boundary conditions are not explored in sufficient depth to support the strong claims made about its interaction with education.

From an empirical standpoint, the paper presents no original data, which is acceptable given its designation as a commentary. However, it draws heavily on case studies that are anecdotal and selectively interpreted. For instance, the case of the Australian professor and the Montana physician, while illustrative, lacks sufficient contextual detail, such as their actual qualifications, public reach, or the specific consequences of their misinformation. These cases would be more compelling if systematically analyzed within a comparative framework, rather than as isolated examples. Furthermore, the claim that these figures embody the educational paradox is asserted rather than demonstrated. There is little evidence that their behavior stems from narcissism or that their audiences are uniquely persuaded by their credentials as opposed to ideological alignment or affective trust.

Methodologically, the paper's reliance on narrative case studies limits its generalizability. The manuscript would benefit from greater methodological transparency about how these examples were selected and what criteria were used to interpret them as emblematic of the broader phenomenon. The commentary also draws on secondary sources without sufficiently distinguishing between peer-reviewed empirical research and journalistic or grey literature. For example, the treatment of VAERS misuse is appropriate and important, but it would be more analytically robust if situated within a systematic review of how adverse event data is misused across contexts.

In the General Discussion, the manuscript makes several broad policy and educational recommendations, including curricular reform to enhance epistemic humility and legislative changes around expert testimony. While these are sensible suggestions, they remain speculative and loosely connected to the evidence presented. The call for more interdisciplinary curricula and media literacy is widely endorsed in education research, but the manuscript does not engage with existing models or evaluate why such reforms have struggled to take hold. Likewise, the recommendation that expert witnesses disclose domain-relevant qualifications is laudable, but it is unclear whether such reforms would realistically counteract the deep ideological mistrust that underlies many anti-science movements. The broader implication that credentialism is structurally embedded in scientific and professional culture is briefly acknowledged but not explored, limiting the manuscript's critical depth.

In conclusion, while the manuscript raises an important and timely issue—the misuse of credentials in anti-science discourse—it does so in a way that is more rhetorically persuasive than analytically rigorous. The theoretical framework needs further development to clearly define and differentiate key constructs.

The empirical examples, though illustrative, would benefit from more systematic analysis and contextual grounding. The policy implications outlined in the General Discussion are well-intentioned but require greater specificity and alignment with the evidence.

## **Declarations**

**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.