

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 13, 2021

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TTUHSC Office of Global Health to Host September Lecture *Speakers Will Discuss Vaccines, Science Denialism, Martial Arts and Fitness*

As part of its ongoing lecture series that addresses health issues that affect the world, the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC) Office of Global Health will virtually host, “Vaccine hesitancy and science denialism in social media, martial arts and fitness subcultures,” from noon to 1 p.m. Sept. 15 via Zoom.

Speakers for the event will include Stephan Kesting, a Brazilian jiu-jitsu expert, first responder, small business owner and social media cultural instigator; and Jeff Dennis, Ph.D., an assistant professor of public health for the TTUHSC Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences.

Christopher O’Dell, assistant director for TTUHSC’s Office of Global Health, said the lecture series seeks to foster a more globally engaged public by providing opportunities to explore a variety of topics relevant to global health to citizens throughout the communities served by TTUHSC. The September lecture is important because Kesting and Dennis will discuss issues related to the pandemic such as science skepticism and vaccine hesitancy.

“The denial of expert consensus seems to have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic,” O’Dell said. “Many of the benefits and luxuries we enjoy as a society rely on adherence to evidence-based research and the guidance of experts across many fields, particularly in public and global health. If we as individuals and as a society dismiss the scientific process, we increase our risk for disease, death and poor quality of life.”

Kesting, a 22-year first responder and a well-known martial artist, also has a background in biology, experimental design and statistic. He boasts approximately 500,000 social media followers across all platforms, including YouTube. For the last 18 months, Kesting has generated significant backlash and controversy by using his social media influence to combat misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19, vaccination and the scientific method.

“Our purpose for inviting Mr. Kesting to the lecture series is to highlight his story and allow attendees to interact with someone who has been both professionally and personally impacted by the spread of misinformation and disinformation across social media and within the martial arts and fitness subcultures during the COVID-19 pandemic,” O’Dell said.

As a TTUHSC public health faculty member and a social epidemiologist, Dennis’ research primarily explores social determinants of health, and more recently, the intersection between mental health and criminal justice. O’Dell said Dennis will speak as a public health expert.

“Dr. Dennis can address any questions or concerns our audience might have regarding the professional practice of the scientific method and/or the interaction between COVID-19 and social determinants of health such as socioeconomic status, education, environment, social support networks, access to health care and others.”

To register for the event, visit https://ttuhsc.zoom.us/webinar/register/9816306141174/WN_jhZ4wcgRQdur-mn_3g12Hg. The lecture will be recorded and made available to the public.

O'Dell said TTUHSC's Office of Global Health also offers monthly film and cultural series that so far in 2021 have reached more than 1,000 TTUHSC and local community members across 31 events.

“Our events are always free, open to the public and advertised on the TTUHSC and Texas Tech University announcement and event pages,” he added.