The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Doctors Invite Big Name Anti-Vaxxers to Covid Wards

By AFP

November 24, 2021



Russia has seen more than 1,000 coronavirus deaths a day in recent weeks. **Sofia Sandurskaya / Moskva News Agency**

Leading Russian doctors on Wednesday invited celebrities and politicians with anti-vaccine views to visit Covid red zones in hospitals and see for themselves the dramatic effects of the pandemic.

In an open letter published by state news agency TASS, 11 doctors from several cities wrote to a dozen public figures who expressed anti-vaccine views to their hundreds of thousands of followers on social media.

Related article: Russia to Introduce Vaccine Passports Amid Record Virus Surge

Russia, one of the countries worst-hit by the coronavirus pandemic, is struggling with

widespread opposition to vaccination even though it has developed several homegrown jabs including Sputnik V.

Despite multiple pleas from President Vladimir Putin, only 37% of Russians are fully vaccinated and the country has seen more than 1,000 deaths a day in recent weeks.

In their letter, the doctors told several singers, actors, TV personalities and politicians who had expressed skepticism over vaccinations that they would take the time to show them around Covid treatment centers.

"We are all somewhat busy, you can probably guess with what," said the letter, whose signatories included prominent Moscow doctor Denis Protsenko, who is in charge of the capital's main Covid hospital.

"But given how many people read and listen to you, we will find time to escort you through the red zones, intensive care units and pathology departments of our hospitals," the doctors said.

"Maybe after that, you will change your position and fewer people will die," it added.

Among others, the letter was addressed to TV personality Oskar Kuchera, who doubted the safety of vaccines to his almost 300,000 followers on Instagram this month.

Kremlin welcomes letter

It was also addressed to actor Yegor Beroyev, who compared introducing restrictions for unvaccinated Muscovites to Nazi Germany's treatment of Jews, and to rock star Konstantin Kinchev who told a tabloid he "did not want to live in a digital concentration camp."

The doctors also appealed to politicians including 77-year-old Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov, whose party has organized protests against mandatory vaccinations and health passes.

"We live in an age when the opinion of a professional in any industry can be easily dispelled by some famous person," Protsenko wrote on his Telegram channel, explaining why the doctors wrote the letter.

"There is a real war happening, we are losing more than 1,000 people in it every day, who did not prepare their body to encounter this dangerous virus," he said.

The Kremlin welcomed the letter as a "positive" move.

"Let's hope that the authority of these doctors will help at least one of those people change their point of view," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Wednesday.

He said Russia has a "not wide, limited circle of people that are skeptical of vaccinations."

Two years into the pandemic, anti-vaccine sentiment remains widespread in Russia.

Russia has recorded more than 9.4 million coronavirus cases since the start of the pandemic,

the fifth-highest number in the world, and more than 266,000 virus-related deaths, according to government figures.

State statistics agency Rosstat said the actual death toll from the pandemic in the country was closer to 450,000 by the end of September.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/11/24/russian-doctors-invite-big-name-anti-vaxxers-to-covid-wards-a75654