

BURDA ON HEALTHCARE

Vampires in Medical School

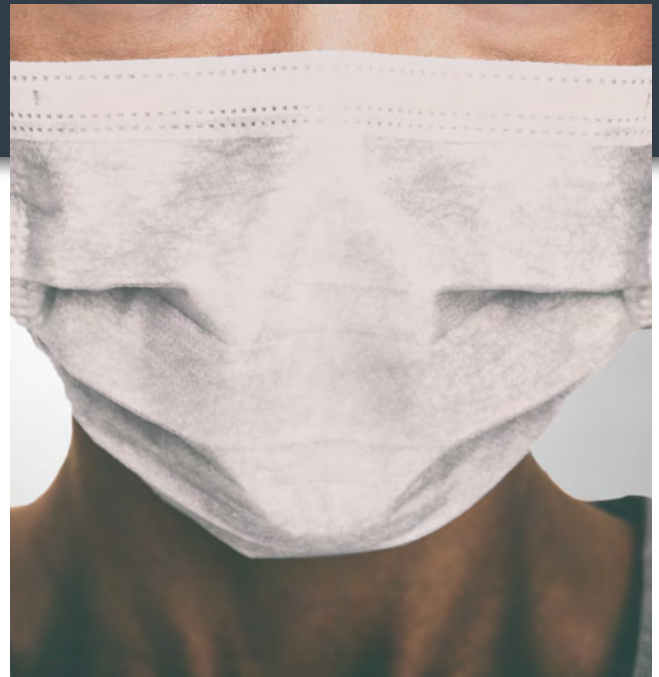
By David Burda

March 31, 2026

We learn lessons in life from many sources. One source, at least for me, is the movies. For example, my skepticism and borderline fear of artificial intelligence (AI) come from repeated viewings in the 1970s of 2001: A Space Odyssey. "I'm sorry, Dave, I'm afraid I can't do that."

Fast forward more than 50 years to March 11, 2026, when researchers from the University of Southern California published this scary [study](#) on the ability of agentic AI to coordinate disinformation social media campaigns without human direction. You can read a story about the study [here](#).

Another movie I learned a life lesson from was [The Lost Boys](#), a 1987 dark comedy/horror movie about teens battling vampires in a small town in northern California on the Pacific coast. The lesson is, vampires can't enter your house unless you invite them in. Once they're in, they don't leave and cause lots of mayhem. Here's the [scene](#) when the fateful invitation is made. Spoiler alert: Max Lawrence, played by the late Edward Herrmann, is the vampire.



Obviously, there are no vampires. At least I'm pretty sure there are no vampires. But the takeaway is this: don't invite trouble into your house, your business, your life if you can avoid it. Really bad things happen, and it's hard to make them stop.

AMA AND AAMC LET THE MAGA VAMPIRES IN

So, what does all this have to do with healthcare?

The American Medical Association (AMA) and Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) invited Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., and Department of Education Secretary Linda McMahon into the house of U.S. medical education.

Are RFK Jr. and McMahon vampires? Probably not, though RFK Jr.'s cousin Caroline [called him a predator](#) prior to the Senate confirming him as HHS Secretary. McMahon, for herself, wants to cap federal school loans for graduate degrees in a number of disciplines, including nursing. You can read the Department of Education's proposed rules [here](#). The public comment period on the rules, laughingly named Reimaging and Improving Student Education ended on March 2. But now that the AMA and the AAMC invited two MAGA stalwarts into medical school, it's a matter of time before they suck the lifeblood out of science-based, evidence-based medical education.

Let me rewind this movie to explain how we got to the March 5 [announcement](#) by HHS and DOE that 53 medical schools will build "meaningful nutrition training" into their curricula for their medical students.

Scene 1: RFK Jr. and McMahon Threaten U.S. Medical Education Organizations

On Aug. 27, 2025, RFK Jr. and McMahon [publicly demand](#) that medical schools start teaching nutrition to students as medical schools allegedly have failed to do. RFK Jr. and McMahon said that failure has caused an epidemic of chronic diseases that are preventable by better diets. HHS and DOE gave all "U.S. medical education organizations" a Sept. 10, 2025, deadline to respond. Essentially, the pair said, "You got a nice medical school here. It would be a shame if something happened to it." You learn that lesson from Goodfellas.

Scene 2: The AAMC Pushes Back but Ultimately Bends the Knee to MAGA

On Sept. 10, 2025, the AAMC politely [responds](#) to the demand from HHS and DOE. The AAMC and the AMA co-sponsor something called the [Liaison Committee on Medical Education](#) (LCME), which accredits medical education programs based on how well the programs' curricula meet the group's accreditation standards for earning an M.D. degree. The AAMC agrees doctors "must be adequately prepared with the competencies to address their patients' nutrition-related health needs" and cites numerous ways the AAMC is helping do that. In fact, 94% of medical schools require nutrition content in their curricula, the AAMC letter says. Then the knee bend to MAGA: "While we have made tremendous progress, we also recognize that much work remains to enhance nutrition and chronic disease with medical education."



Scene 3: The LCME Proposes a New Standard that Mandates Nutrition Education

At some point after Sept. 10, the LCME proposes a new accreditation standard, called Element 7.3, that would require medical schools to explicitly teach evidence-based nutrition to their medical students. The public comment period on the proposed standard ended on Jan. 7, 2026, according to what little I could find in my online searches.

Scene 4: The AMA Supports Mandated Nutrition Education and Bends the Knee to MAGA

On Oct. 7, 2025, the AMA "applauds" the LCME's proposed standard explicitly requiring evidence-based nutrition education for future physicians. In "strongly" supporting it, the AMA said, "Good nutrition is essential to preventing and managing chronic disease, and this increased focus in medical training will ensure physicians are fully equipped to help patients live healthier lives." But not before the AMA also bends the knee to the MAGAs, commending RFK Jr. and McMahon for "prioritizing nutrition in physician training to improve patient health outcomes." The AMA a month later was still touting its support of mandatory nutrition training in medical school as reported in this Nov. 7, 2025, article by the AMA itself, "[AMA backs effort to boost nutrition training in medical schools.](#)"

Scene 5: HHS and the Department of Agriculture Unveil Unscientific and Unempirical Dietary Guidelines

Then comes the unexpected plot twist. On Jan. 7, 2026, the same day public comments are due on the proposed requirement that medical schools teach evidence-based nutrition, HHS and the Department of Agriculture [unveil](#) the new MAGA-inspired food pyramid for the U.S., formerly called [Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025-2030](#). "At long last, we are realigning our food system to support American farmers, ranchers, and companies that grow and produce real food," said AG Secretary Brooke Rollins. "Farmers and ranchers are at the forefront of the solution, and that means more protein, dairy, vegetables, fruits, healthy fats, and whole grains on American dinner tables." Rollins is also a MAGA supporter who co-founded the [American First Policy Institute](#) with McMahon in 2021. The new dietary guidelines encourage people to eat protein like red meat and eggs at every meal and eat and drink full-fat dairy products. No mention of doctors being at the forefront of the solution to diet-related chronic disease, just farmers and ranchers.



Scene 6: Were the AMA and AAMC Duped into Requiring Unhealthy Nutrition Guidelines?

Something happens here that I'm not privy to or couldn't find in my research. It must be in the director's cut that will come out someday. But I have a feeling it must be related to something my old primary care physician told me years ago after my blood test revealed that I had high cholesterol. He called my blood "cream" and told me to dramatically reduce my consumption of red meat and eggs and to switch to skim milk. His instructions were the exact opposite of the special interest-driven dietary guidelines from RFK Jr., Rollins, farmers and ranchers. I followed my doctor's orders, and I'm still here. Whole milk or even 2% taste like vanilla milkshakes after years of drinking skim. The healthiest people I know are vegetarians or vegans. Yet these are the nutritional guidelines that MAGA presumably wants medical schools to teach their students and that the AMA and AAMC agreed to require. Did the AMA and AAMC make a deal with the devil before they knew the MAGAs were rewriting the script or thought that any rewrite would be minor rather than life-threatening to patients?

Scene 7: Evidence Goes Missing

Here's where the trail gets cold for me. I have no clue what happened to the draft LCME [accreditation standard](#) that would require medical schools to teach nutrition. The LCME's accreditation standards for medical school curricula for the 2026-2027 academic year make no mention of nutrition education in Section 7, or Standard 7, which covers curriculum content. I searched for the word "nutrition" on the LCME site, and nothing came up. I did find something called the [LCME Publications Change Log](#), dated Jan. 22, 2026. The 32-page log details all of the changes the LCME has made to all its documents and publications. Again, no mention of nutrition, though the log revealed other MAGA-inspired changes. For example, the LCME struck the phrase "recognize the benefits of diversity" from all its publications. I'll save the anti-DEI in medical school stuff for the sequel.



Scene 8: The Celebratory Finale

That bring me to the March 5 announcement from DOE and HHS: Secretary McMahon and Secretary Kennedy Celebrate Medical School Commitments to Increase Nutrition Training for Future Doctors. Here are the massaged and nuanced quotes from McMahon, RFK Jr., AMA President Bobby Mukkamala, M.D., and AAMC President and CEO David Skorton, M.D., (from a separately issued AAMC press release).

“To make America great again, we must make it healthy — and today’s commitment by leading universities is a critical step down that road.”

—DOE Secretary Linda McMahon

“Today medical schools are committing to change how America trains its doctors — by putting nutrition back where it belongs: at the heart of patient care.”

—HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.

“Today, there is real momentum to bring evidence-based nutrition education into medical school and residency training.”

—AMA President Bobby Mukkamala, M.D.



“Today is about recognizing the important work medical schools have already done and their commitment to further progress in the future.”

—AAMC President and CEO David Skorton, M.D.

HOLES IN THE PLOT

But this celebratory finale doesn’t add up for me. There are 163 medical schools in the U.S., but only 53 medical schools agreed to the deal. What’s up with the other 110 medical schools? Do they already have nutrition training in their curricula? Do they not believe the connection between nutrition and chronic disease? Did they see the new dietary guidelines they’re supposed to teach and say they’re ridiculous? Did they not want to invite MAGA vampires into their school buildings?

What about the 53 medical schools that did agree to the deal? Did they not teach any nutrition in their curricula for medical students? A look at the map of their location suggests that most the 53 schools are in states that voted for Trump in the 2024 presidential election. So maybe it’s just an expression of their fealty to their cult leader? Or their fear of losing research grants?

I’m sure it’s just a coincidence that the three medical schools whose admissions policies are under investigation by the U.S. Justice Department, as [reported](#) by the New York Times, aren’t on the list of 53 that bent the knee.

Regardless of the reason, the only thing the participating medical schools did was *voluntarily commit* to a minimum of 40 hours of nutrition education for the 2026-2027 academic year. It’s voluntary. Nothing is required. Nothing is mandatory. That probably explains the disappearance of the proposed accreditation standard from the LCME that would have made nutrition education a requirement. Those schools don’t have to teach medical students about dietary guidelines that they know, based on science and evidence, would lead to more, not less, obesity and obesity-related chronic diseases.

BEWARE OF THE SEQUELS

I guess that's the good news for us healthcare consumers. The AMA, the AAMC, the LCME and medical schools dodged a silver bullet this time. Wait, that's werewolves, not vampires. But like *The Lost Boys*, once you invite a vampire into your home, they don't leave, and they're going to cause a lot of problems.

How long before RFK Jr., McMahon and Rollins want medical schools to stop teaching medical students about evidence-based, scientifically tested and proven-safe vaccines and immunizations?

How long before RFK Jr., McMahon and Rollins want U.S. medical schools to add unproven, unscientific and unsafe medical treatments to their curricula as alternatives to recognized standards of medical care?

The AMA and the AAMC already have scrubbed DEI language offensive to MAGA vampires from all of the LCME's documents and publication.

The possible confirmation of faux physician Casey Means as the faux U.S. Surgeon General only make those two formerly unthinkable sequels more possible. Means is another vampire.

The second you invite them in, it's already too late.



Time to stock up on garlic, wooden stakes and Holy Water. Just ask the Frog Brothers, who are probably doctors by now.

AUTHOR



David Burda began covering healthcare in 1983 and hasn't stopped since. Dave writes this monthly column "Burda on Healthcare," contributes weekly blog posts, manages our weekly newsletter 4sight Friday, and hosts our weekly Roundup podcast. Dave believes that healthcare is a business like any other business, and customers — patients — are king. If you do what's right for patients, good business results will follow.

Dave's personal experiences with the healthcare system both as a patient and family caregiver have shaped his point of view. It's also been shaped by covering the industry for 40 years as a reporter and editor. He worked at Modern Healthcare for 25 years, the last 11 as editor.

Prior to Modern Healthcare, he did stints at the American Medical Record Association (now AHIMA) and the American Hospital Association. After Modern Healthcare, he wrote a monthly column for Twin Cities Business explaining healthcare trends to a business audience, and he developed and executed content marketing plans for leading healthcare corporations as the editorial director for healthcare strategies at MSP Communications.

When he's not reading and writing about healthcare, Dave spends his time riding the trails of DuPage County, IL, on his bike, tending his vegetable garden and daydreaming about being a lobster fisherman in Maine. He lives in Wheaton, IL, with his lovely wife of 40 years and his three children, none of whom want to be journalists or lobster fishermen.

Visit 4sight.com/insights to read more from David Burda.