

TEN RED FLAGS

Dr A publishes a study showing that food *X* increases the risk of disease *Y*. Critics accuse her of incompetence, scaremongering and ethical violations. Do these accusations constitute harassment or healthy debate?

	Raises red flags about researcher	Raises red flags about critics
Expertise	Does Dr A's contested work fall outside her training or her previous publications?	Are the critics operating outside their area of apparent expertise? Do the critics refuse to engage with the peer-reviewed literature?
Conflicts	Is Dr A funded by competitors of <i>X</i> ? Is she marketing an antidote for <i>Y</i> ?	Do the critics have a financial interest in the results?
Communication	Did Dr A promote this work without publishing it in a peer-reviewed journal?	Do the critics attack all researchers who show that <i>X</i> is harmful?
Errors	Does Dr A have a track record of major errors? Has she been defensive about minor errors?	Do the critics use small errors to dismiss all of Dr A's work?
Balance	Does Dr A have a record of misrepresenting evidence? Does she dismiss counter-arguments?	Do the critics have a record of cherry-picking evidence in public statements?
Scholarship	Are results out of line with existing, reputable scholarship, if it exists?	Can the critics specify what they would regard as convincing evidence?
Transparency	Has Dr A refused to make data available? Has she ignored reasonable disclosure standards?	Are the critics making showy demands for already-public data, or for data for which patients have not consented to publication?
Track record	Has Dr A routinely promoted flashy work without peer review?	Do the critics attack scientists across disciplines on different topics? Do they have a track record of harassment or vexatious complaints?
Insults or libel	Does Dr A uniformly dismiss critics as ignorant, biased or conflicted?	Are the critics levelling personal attacks? Are criticisms from anonymous sources or 'sock puppets'?
Freedom-of-information requests	Does Dr A claim that funding sources are irrelevant? Has she erected barricades to disclosure?	Do the critics use freedom-of-information requests for private correspondence unrelated to funding?