

The government has shut down a dependable database on health science.

**By The Editorial Board**

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The National Guideline Clearinghouse is a federal database intended to help doctors answer almost any medical question you can think of: Can this emergency room patient tolerate a procedure that normally requires an empty stomach? Does that patient need a stent? Which antibiotic should this patient be started on?

If that sounds like a small matter, it isn't. The sheer volume of medical information now within a few clicks' reach can make it difficult, even for doctors, to separate wheat from chaff. Clinical guidelines based on careful consideration and solid impartial research can be difficult to tell apart from those based on weak data, or rooted in a clear conflict of interest (usually a financial stake in whatever treatment they are promoting). The clearinghouse, which not only vets countless sources of medical information but also makes its results easily searchable, is regarded as the most dependable repository of its kind in the world.

On Monday, the Department of Health and Human Services took it offline, the latest casualty in an administration determined to eliminate science from the government's agenda.

The official explanation is maddening enough: a budget shortfall that roughly equals the amount Tom Price spent on travel during his brief tenure as department secretary. The site costs just \$1.2 million a year to operate, and is maintained by an agency with a budget of more than \$300 million.

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