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Let's talk about comparing doctors, politicians and journalists we don't like to Trump

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...and why that's maybe a bad idea

He's become inescapable. The neologisms (bigly), the punchlines (FAKE NEWS!). The U.S. president—that mango tornado—has stormed through our social media feeds, our news channels and our pop culture. Of all the forces of nature he's been compared to (including the one above), perhaps the most apt is that of a vast flood washing through our weary psyche.

It should be obvious by now that medical politics in Ontario isn't exactly higher ground.

It began, as far as I can tell, last July when André Picard at the Globe and Mail delivered a [scorching rebuke](#) of Concerned Ontario Doctors who were fighting against the tentative Physician Services Agreement. "It's Trumpism pure and simple," Picard wrote. "Lashing out at everything and everyone with self-righteous indignation, but proposing nothing."

After a vote to oust the leaders of the Ontario Medical Association [failed](#) in late January, the OMA issued a press release claiming doctors were "unified," intentionally ignoring a non-confidence vote that was passed at the same meeting. As luck would have it, right around the same time Trump's senior adviser, Kellyanne Conway, had unwittingly coined the term "alternative facts" in an [interview with Chuck Todd](#), and the comparison seemed too ripe for reporters—and the doctors speaking to them—to pass up. (The OMA later took down its statement and released a revised one.)

Then there was the [Bob Rae tweet](#). The former Ontario premier told nearly 100,000 people who follow him that the OMA was a group "fighting for higher incomes for docs. Period." A few doctors eagerly pointed out that the "Period" contained shades of Sean Spicer, the embattled press secretary who declared in his first statement to the American people that Trump had the largest crowd to ever witness the inauguration—a statement that was demonstrably false for anyone capable of [looking at a photograph](#).

Most recently, there was [Heather Mallick](#) in the Star with what seemed to be a thinly veiled shot at Concerned Ontario Doctors ("The Trump White House"), and [Concerned Ontario Doctors](#) on Twitter with a far more obvious shot at the Star (#fakenews).

I could go on, but shan't. Point is, accusations of "Trumpism" are now regularly co-opted by almost anyone in any argument to discredit whoever they disagree with. Which is occasionally appropriate, but also lazy.

For a short case study, it may help to think of the evolution of another way-overused comparison: Nazis. The label used to be reserved for those who did indisputably evil or racist things (like the Nazis did). But over the last 70 years, those associations have weakened even as the figures still loom in our imaginations. Today, we can all agree that it can sometimes be OK to joke about them (see: Fawlty Towers, Seinfeld's "Soup Nazi," people who care about grammar, etc.).

To me, that's not troubling. What is is the most recent stretch of that evolution. Certain web denizens we cutely labeled "trolls" have exploited this opening. Their aim: to provoke outrage while still operating, ostensibly, under the premise that they are just joking. But by doing this, they provided cover for those who are not joking. Today, not only is it impossible to distinguish the troll playing a Nazi online from the actual Nazi—it doesn't matter. The co-mingling has resulted in an cross-pollination of sick tricks and ideas. Now, when one of them takes your picture and photoshops it into a gas chamber (an ugly meme used to target many Jewish social media users), the fact that it might have been a joke is irrelevant.

So, we—rightfully, and without irony—call all of them Nazis.

Back to Trump.* In my opinion, thoughtless Trump comparisons are creating the same atmosphere that trolling did: It provides a cover. It introduces noise just as it thrusts these inescapable ideas back to the top of our

minds. When we can't be bothered to think of a more apt comparison than that of the current U.S. president—who's received a warm welcome from the [globe's autocrats](#) and has about as much respect for the truth [as a seven year old](#)—it distorts the bad things Trump has done, and makes it more difficult to tell who deserves to be compared to him. In my view, thoroughly pissed-off doctors and journalists who wrote something you don't like don't qualify.

Moreover, these comparisons don't do what you think they do.

The point of comparing someone to Trump (or his lackeys) is to embarrass them, to shame them out of acting like him (them). But it actually does the opposite. It short-circuits our sense of decency and makes us [eager to punch back](#). One of the most prevalent characteristics of Trumpism is the tendency to project one's own shortcomings on other people ([I-know-you-are-but-what-am-I style](#)). This is basically new White House policy. It is also exactly what people start doing when they're compared to Trump. Just check out the comments on [our coverage](#) of Picard's column.

To see talk amongst doctors and journalists devolve into this adolescent garbage is annoying, again not because it's an insult, but because it's a lazy insult—one that (to keep going with the flood analogy) does nothing but muddy the waters. Let's try harder.

*Here's your perfunctory reminder that accusing someone of Trumpism isn't the same as accusing them of Nazism...most of the time.

Tristan Bronca is a staff writer at the Medical Post.
