

Parkinson's Expert Visited the White House Eight Times in Eight Months

The White House said President Biden had met with a neurologist only three times in more than three years in office. But it would not say whether the visiting expert was consulting with the president's physician about his health.



By Emily Baumgaertner and Peter Baker

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An expert on Parkinson's disease from Walter Reed National Military Medical Center visited the White House eight times in eight months from last summer through this spring, including at least once for a meeting with President Biden's physician, according to official visitor logs.

The expert, Dr. Kevin Cannard, is a neurologist who specializes in movement disorders and recently published a paper on Parkinson's. The logs, released by the White House, document visits from July 2023 through March of this year. More recent visits, if there have been any, would not be released until later under the White House's voluntary disclosure policy.

It was unclear whether Dr. Cannard was at the White House to consult specifically about the president or was there for unrelated meetings. Dr. Cannard's LinkedIn page describes him as "supporting the White House Medical Unit" for more than 12 years. His biography on Doximity, a website for health professionals, lists him as a "neurology consultant to the White House Medical Unit and the physician to the president" from 2012 to 2022, which would include the administrations of Presidents Barack Obama and Donald J. Trump.

Records from the Obama administration, when Mr. Biden was vice president, show that Dr. Cannard made at least 10 visits in 2012 plus a family tour; four in 2013; one in 2014; four in 2015; and eight in 2016. Mr. Trump rescinded Mr. Obama's voluntary White House visitors disclosure policy, so records are not available for his four years in office.

Dr. Cannard did not respond to repeated requests for comment. The White House would not comment specifically on the purpose of Dr. Cannard's recent visits or whether they were related to the president. "A wide variety of specialists from the Walter Reed system visit the White House complex to treat the thousands of military personnel who work on the grounds," Andrew Bates, a White House spokesman, said in a statement.

Without discussing Dr. Cannard specifically, Mr. Bates said the president "has been seen by a neurologist once a year" as part of his overall annual physical checkup and "that examination has found no sign of Parkinson's and he is not being treated for it." He declined to provide dates of any meetings between Mr. Biden and any of his specialists but said that "there have been no neurologist visits besides the one for his physical per year, three in total" during his three and a half years in office.

At her regular briefing later in the day, Karine Jean-Pierre, the White House press secretary, refused to answer questions about Dr. Cannard's visits, saying she would not discuss specialists who come to the White House out of concern for their "privacy" and "security," even though Dr. Cannard lists his affiliation with the White House on a public website.



Dr. Kevin O'Connor, the White House physician, with Mr. Biden at the White House last August. Doug Mills/The New York Times

Dr. Cannard met on Jan. 17 with Dr. Kevin O'Connor, the White House physician, as well as Dr. John Atwood, a cardiologist at Walter Reed, and another person in the early evening in the White House residence clinic, the logs showed. That meeting came a month before Mr. Biden underwent his most recent annual physical checkup at Walter Reed on Feb. 28.

In a six-page letter released after that checkup, Dr. O'Connor said the president's medical team had conducted "an extremely detailed neurologic exam" that had yielded "no findings which would be consistent with" Parkinson's, stroke or other central neurological disorders. Dr. O'Connor did not say whether the examination contained common tests for assessing cognitive decline or detecting signs of dementia that are often recommended for older adults.

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The White House has said in recent days that there has been no reason to conduct further examination since February. Questions about Mr. Biden's health, and specifically about Parkinson's, have proliferated since his disastrous debate performance against Mr. Trump on June 27. In interviews with ABC News on Friday and MSNBC on Monday, Mr. Biden said he had the equivalent of a neurological exam every day because of the pressure of presidential duties.

The visitor logs, which have also been reported by other news organizations, including The New York Post and The Guardian, indicated that Dr. Cannard's first recorded visit to the White House during the Biden administration was on Nov. 15, 2022. The records indicate that he was visiting Joshua Simmons, whose title is not listed.

Dr. Cannard's eight more recent visits started on July 28, 2023, when he was listed as meeting with Megan Nasworthy, a White House liaison to Walter Reed. She was listed as the person visited for seven of those meetings, which consistently occurred early, between 7 and 9 a.m. on Fridays, with the exception of the last meeting, which occurred on Thursday, March 28, the day before Good Friday. The logs note a 10th visit that appeared to be for a family tour of the White House.

Mr. Bates, the White House spokesman, said that while the president always travels with regular doctors, "he has not seen specialists in Delaware," where he has private residences.

Around the time of the first meetings, Dr. Cannard published a research paper in the journal *Parkinsonism & Related Disorders* on the early stages of Parkinson's.

An array of neurologists who have not personally examined Mr. Biden said they observed symptoms in his public appearances that were consistent with Parkinson's or a related disease, such as hypophonic speech, forward flexed posture, a shuffling gait, masked face and irregular speech pattern. But they emphasized that a specific diagnosis could not be given without firsthand examination.

White House officials said that Mr. Biden had shown no signs of Parkinson's and that Dr. O'Connor found no reason to re-evaluate Mr. Biden for the disease since his physical in February. Mr. Bates also said the president has never taken Levodopa or other drugs for that condition.

In his interview with ABC News on Friday, Mr. Biden declined to agree to an independent neurological and cognitive exam. "I get a cognitive test every day," he said, meaning that the exceptional challenges of the presidency effectively tested him on a daily basis.

Calling into "Morning Joe" on MSNBC on Monday morning, Mr. Biden insisted again that his confusion and halting performance at the debate were an aberration due in part to an infection or other minor ailment, and were not a sign of a larger medical issue.

"If there was something that was wrong that night, it's not like it comes and that's one night and it goes away," he said. "That's why I've been out. I've been testing myself, testing everywhere I go. Going out and making the case. The night of that debate, I went out. I was out until 2 o'clock in the morning that very night. That very night. It drives me nuts, people talking about this."

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