Scientific Integrity and Publication Ethics in the Pandemic
8th National Bioethics Conference, Delhi
12th December 2020
Dr Cat Chatfield, Research Integrity Editor, The BMJ
Competing interests

• I am an employee of The BMJ which publishes Open Access research and charges authors a fee for their submissions
• I am on the Editorial Board of BMJ Open Quality, another Open Access journal wholly owned by BMJ
• I am on the International Planning Committee of the International Forum of Quality and Safety in Healthcare and The Healthcare Improvement Science Institute’s annual conference
“Integrity in Research... this is what distinguishes Science from Fiction”

Dr Thomas Kitching
Professor of Astrophysics, UCL

Image: © NASA, ESA, and the Hubble Heritage Team (STScI/AURA)
Conducting & producing research which is...

- Honest
- Rigorous
- Transparent and open
- Undertaken with care and respect

Challenges for research integrity in the pandemic
Challenges for research integrity in the pandemic

1. Volume
Number of Research submissions over time from Jan 2017 to 21st April 2020

- Total submissions
- UK submissions
- US submissions
- ROW submissions
Searching content for covid coronavirus (any words) in title or abstract and covid coronavirus (any words) in full text, from Jan 2020 to Dec 2020.

Showing results 1 to 10 of 1,789 for covid coronavirus (any words) in title or abstract and covid coronavirus (any words) in full text, from Jan 2020 to Dec 2020.
Challenges for research integrity in the pandemic

1. Volume
2. Quality of research
Waste in covid-19 research: how do we make the outpouring of research more effective?

A deluge of poor quality research is sabotaging an effective evidence based response. The medical research world is responding to the covid-19 pandemic... 

bmj.com
Challenges for research integrity in the pandemic

1. Volume / resources
2. Quality of research
3. Speed / Timeliness
Challenges for research integrity in the pandemic

1. Volume / resources
2. Quality of research
3. Speed / Timeliness
4. Non-work pressures and priorities
Opportunities for research integrity in the pandemic
Opportunities for research integrity in the pandemic

1. Build strong, resilient systems
Analysis

Face masks for the public during the covid-19 crisis

BR 2020;369 doi: https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m1435 (Published 09 April 2020)
Cite this as: BR 2020;369:m1435

Read our latest coverage of the coronavirus pandemic

Trisha Greenhalgh, professor 1, Manuel B Schmid, consultant 2 3, Thomas Czyzio, chief health economist 4 5, Dirk Bassler, professor 2 3, Laurence Gruer, professor 6 7

Author affiliations

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Trisha Greenhalgh and colleagues argue that it is time to apply the precautionary principle
### Visual Summary of Recommendation

#### Population
This recommendation applies only to people with these characteristics:

- **Patients with confirmed covid-19**

#### Disease Severity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-severe</th>
<th>Severe</th>
<th>Critical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absence of signs of severe or critical disease</td>
<td>SpO₂ &lt; 90% on room air</td>
<td>Requires life sustaining treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respiratory rate &gt; 30 in adults</td>
<td>Acute respiratory distress syndrome</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raised respiratory rate in children</td>
<td>Sepsis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signs of severe respiratory distress</td>
<td>Septic shock</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Interventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remdesivir</th>
<th>Corticosteroids</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation against (weak)</td>
<td>Recommendation in favour (strong)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Opportunities for research integrity in the pandemic

1. Build strong, resilient systems

2. Evidence value of peer review, data sharing and other processes which strengthen research integrity
The Timeline of a Scandal

Surgisphere Corporation had a busy few months in 2020, overseeing the launch of a new website, the publication of high-impact papers on treatments and outcomes in COVID-19 patients, and eventually a collapse of its reputation.

- **February**
  - FEB 10: Facing at least three medical malpractice lawsuits, Sapan Desai leaves Northwest Community Hospital. He and the hospital later say he left for personal reasons.
  - MID-FEB: Surgisphere Corporation, the company Desai founded in 2008, launches a new website. The content, including articles describing collaborations that didn’t take place, will be uploaded starting in March, some with 2019 publication dates.

- **March**
  - MARCH 26: Surgisphere announces the development of a set of COVID-19 diagnostic tools in collaboration with the nonprofit African Federation for Emergency Medicine (AFEM) to help clinicians in low-resource areas.

- **April**
  - APRIL 6: Desai and three coauthors post a preprint on SSRN reporting a positive association between treatment with the antiparasitic drug ivermectin and survival of hospitalized COVID-19 patients. The paper uses Surgisphere’s proprietary patient registry, which Desai claims gathered real-time electronic medical records from hospitals around the world.
  - APRIL 19: The original ivermectin preprint is replaced on SSRN with a second version that contains different patient numbers but draws the same conclusion about ivermectin’s link to patient survival.

- **May**
  - MAY 1: Desai and four coauthors publish a paper in The New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM) about the association between cardiovascular disease, treatment with heart drugs, and COVID-19 mortality. All authors approve a statement that they can “vouch for the accuracy and completeness of the data.”
  - MAY 7: Researchers at ISGlobal in Barcelona write to all four coauthors on the ivermectin study with concerns about potential discrepancies between the numbers in Surgisphere’s database and the study’s figures.
Opportunities for research integrity in the pandemic

1. Build strong, resilient systems
2. Evidence value of peer review, data sharing and other processes which strengthen research integrity
3. Receptive environment for innovation such as post-publication peer review
Thank you