When Journals succumb to devious trials!

Reddy and Gupta emphasize the importance of effective communication during the COVID-19 infodemic. They underscore that to control the pandemic, widespread community participation is a necessary tool and, therefore, sharing reliable information with masses in real-time is a skill, physicians need to hone and is as much needed nowadays as clinical evaluation and care. While that expertise has its significance, a unique feature of this pandemic is that it is the largest one unraveling in an era of the digital revolution and many a times events happen at such a high speed in the virtual world that even highly trained persons find it difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff. When someone or some group makes a false claim of miracle-cure, by the time it comes under the radar/scrutiny of experts and statutory bodies and they offer some clarification/rebuttal; a lot of impressions are already generated on social media. And this reality exhorts us to double down our efforts to track, trace, and isolate not only the biological virus but also the misinformation virus.

Having realized the reality of alternative facts and the necessity to rapidly dispel false claims, India with 12 other nations is leading a mission to counter disinformation. State authorities are using Section 54 of the Disaster Management Act, Section 66 D of Information Technology Act, and Section 505 (1) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) to book the culprits who found the opportunity to cash in on the pandemic by profiteering or gaining attention by exploiting human fear. However, not only the laymen and press have become targets of the fake news/half-truths with wrong/incomplete/misleading information in our times; even medical journals are not spared by the malady. New England Journal of Medicine and Lancet, both published studies where hydroxychloroquine/angiotensin-converting-enzyme (ACE) inhibitors/ivermectin are shown to have certain effects when consumed and then afterward due to data integrity posers, were forced to retract those papers. The lesson we learn is that peer-reviewed studies are not foolproof ones and eminence-based medicine sometimes trumps evidence-based medicine.

Another unique challenge of our times in this pandemic is the leadership void. After the cold-war era, US hegemony was the default setting not only for war but also for scientific and academic leadership. Still the maximum number of the best in the scientific field with maximum experience is working in American labs. Nevertheless, President Trump earned notoriety for repeatedly making tall unproven claims, berating doctors as well as federal agencies having a long stellar record and his status appears to be incorrigible. When the most powerful President on the Earth exhorts to Make America Great Again & America First, people around the globe get misleading signals that who will get the first shot of the vaccine, when it is discovered. When money and efforts should be put behind the best vaccine and pharmaceutical candidates, the emergence of vaccine nationalism is our new reality. Therefore, disseminating correct information is as much necessary as fighting and defeating the hydra-headed scourge of alt-news and post-truth.

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We accessed all the webpages at the time of submission of this manuscript.