

Correspondence

Fight pseudoscience responsibly

Battle cries to take up “cudgels” against pseudoscience sparked by COVID-19 (T. Caulfield *Nature* <http://doi.org/ggtbvj>; 2020) could backfire. Although Caulfield makes important points about the need to counteract misinformation, war metaphors and hostility are more likely, in our experience, to antagonize perpetrators of misinformation – and so exacerbate the problem. We should instead be pre-emptively disseminating factual evidence so that people become more resistant to false information.

As members of Critica, a non-profit organization that corrects scientific and medical misinformation (www.criticascience.org), we contend that the problem does not stem from just a lack of knowledge. Many view COVID-19 as a political rather than a scientific issue, for example. And pseudoscience perpetrators are wary of experts – marginalizing and ignoring them over vaccination, for instance. This must not happen if and when a vaccine against COVID-19 emerges.

More-effective communication by scientists is the key. Although we do not yet have the luxury of making recommendations based on settled science, enough evidence exists to guide our attempts at communication. Respectful online discussion is more likely than ridicule to engage the curious and convince the unconvinced.

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Heat and COVID-19 could be twin killers

People who are especially vulnerable to COVID-19 also tend to be more affected by extreme weather events. Examples include elderly people and those living in densely populated cities. As the pandemic continues, scientists should help politicians to develop plans and policies that protect those most susceptible to the cascade of socio-economic risks that could arise when these hazards combine.

We need to find out how human behaviour is changing in response to COVID-19, how this affects demands for food, energy, the Internet and transportation, and whether these altered demands are likely to increase or decrease people's susceptibility to the effects of extreme weather. Heatwaves could make COVID-19 shelter-in-place policies dangerous, for example, if elderly people or those with low incomes do not have air conditioning.

Cities and scientists must work together to protect urban residents. They need to improve city infrastructure, expand data sharing and create open communication channels between policymakers, planners and researchers. They should focus first on those most in need.

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Opening up journals' editorial practices

We have launched a Platform for Responsible Editorial Policies (www.responsiblejournals.org). This facilitates transparent review and research into peer-review procedures, thereby contributing to open science and optimal journal management (see P. Wouters *et al. Nature* **569**, 621–623 (2019) and F. Squazzoni *et al. Nature* **578**, 512–514; 2020).

Funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development, and created with the Leiden Centre for Science and Technology Studies, the platform currently hosts a database of 387 journals. It evaluates these journals' peer-review procedures according to 12 criteria, including: the level of anonymity afforded to authors and reviewers; the use of digital tools such as plagiarism scanners; and the timing of peer review in the research and publication process (see S. P. J. M. Horbach and W. Halffman *Scientometrics* **118**, 339–373; 2019). The platform displays the procedures used by each journal, along with aggregate statistics on the various editorial practices.

We invite journal editors to provide such information for inclusion in the database. In response, we offer tailored suggestions for improvement, information on alternative review procedures and suggestions on fair use of journal metrics for evaluation. The platform makes data on peer review freely available for further research.

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Lockdown classes with Pam

As a research student working from home during the COVID-19 lockdown, I've discovered a productive new pastime – remotely teaching immunology basics to laboratory members.

My research in Terry Dermody's lab aims to define innate immune responses to reovirus infection in the intestine, a condition that could be linked to coeliac disease (R. Bouziat *et al. Science* **356**, 44–50; 2017). When a research assistant joined the project who was not familiar with the immunology involved, I set up a weekly crash course to help her out. We covered topics ranging from interferon signalling to oral tolerance and virus–host interactions.

Then COVID-19 hit. The lab was shut down. As our sessions resumed online, other lab members started to join these weekly 'Immunology with Pam' classes. I propose topics for discussion, research them and create PowerPoint presentations. In a few weeks, we have covered general concepts, innate immune responses and pathogen-recognition receptors. To my surprise, I felt confident – despite my own initially limited grounding in the subject.

The rewards have included a newfound love of teaching and engaging with my otherwise-preoccupied fellow researchers.

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