Dear Sir,

For many, journals are the ultimate representation and validation of scientific thought. The process of publishing an article is thought to be tried, tested and robust. The author submits his scientific conclusions to a review board - his peers vet and ruthlessly dissect the methodology and conclusions before they unleash another nugget of knowledge upon the scientific community. At least, this is how it's supposed so work.

The recent disaster where two reputed journals ended up publishing, and then retracting, a suspect study on Hydroxychloroquine, might have contributed to detrimental changes in policy. This exposes the underbelly of moral turpitude and intellectual depravity of least some of the big names in the business of scientific publication.

But it wasn't always so! The medical world till a few decades ago, was happily unencumbered with the trappings of modern publishing. Most doctors are simple folk - content when a patient gets better and even more so if he pays the bill! When a doctor felt like telling the world of something he observed over a period of time, he or she wrote about it. Some of the more scientific minded doctors planned studies. These observations shaped medical practice for several decades. All this changed when consumerism snuck into medical universities. With handsome grants on offer, a culture of "Publish or Perish" was born. And with the advent on the Internet, this spread like the plague (or Covid 19)!

Worldover, doctors are now assessed based on their publications rather than their results (treating disease). Now - a lot of work we do as doctors are mundane and repetitive - nothing to write home about (pun not intended). But youngsters are under undue pressure to write about their experience (something they have very little of). CVs are deemed incomplete without "international" publications - a term with no meaning. An international journal can be registered anywhere from Timbaktu to Jhumri Talaiyya. In this context, Indians suffer more than most - with a British journal being more international than a Singaporean one - fruits of a colonial hangover!! The affliction is so bad that some medical universities require certain number of publications from their teaching staff before they are promoted-their ability to teach be damned! Some even need to "invent" devices every year... One can imagine what they invent!! This has ensured a deluge of articles, much of the quality dubious.

With the journals in question having to retract their article, the shallowness of both publishing ethics and the much vaunted peer review process is exposed.

We need to temper the desperation to publish for the sake of it and more importantly interpret any findings with caution, however prestigious the journal (or the author) is and however complex the statistical tools are.

Journals are vital to scientific growth - we just need to ensure that it doesn't replace the growth itself. Glorious irreverence to reputations of journals should replace the awe we have towards them. Our contract is with science - and this is inviolable!!