

U.S. Sen. Johnson: Requests records from top medical journals regarding retracted studies

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WASHINGTON – On Tuesday, U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.), ranking member of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, sent letters to *The Lancet* and the *New England Journal of Medicine* requesting records regarding last year's publication and subsequent retraction of studies on COVID-19 that used questionable data.

The Lancet study, in particular, relied on problematic data to conclude that hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine did not help people with COVID-19. “Although this fraudulent study was ultimately retracted, it is concerning and shameful that, in the midst of a pandemic, *The Lancet* published such a misleading paper on a potential early treatment for COVID-19,” **the senator wrote.**

Both letters are below and can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

December 14, 2021

Dr. Richard Horton

Editor-in-Chief

The Lancet

230 Park Avenue

New York, NY 10169

Dear Dr. Horton:

I write to request information regarding the publication and subsequent retraction of a study published in The Lancet titled, “Hydroxychloroquine or chloroquine with or without a macrolide for treatment of COVID-19: a multinational registry analysis” (“the study” or “the paper”). This study, which first appeared in The Lancet on May 22, 2020, reportedly found that, “treating people who have [COVID-19] with chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine did not help and might have increased the risk of abnormal heart rhythms and death.”

According to reports, following the study’s publication, scientists and clinicians raised concerns about the veracity of the data used in the study. Specifically, experts questioned, “the astonishing number of patients involved and details about their demographics and prescribed dosing[.]” The Surgisphere Corporation (“Surgisphere”), a Chicago-based company, supplied the dataset that served as the basis for the study. Surgisphere’s owner and founder, Dr. Sapan Desai, was one of the authors of the study.

On June 3, 2020, The Lancet issued an “expression of concern” regarding the study after “serious scientific questions” were brought to the editors’ attention. On June 5, 2020, the authors of the study, not including Dr. Desai, published a statement retracting their paper. Shortly after the retraction, you reportedly called the study a “fabrication” and “a monumental fraud.”

Although this fraudulent study was ultimately retracted, it is concerning and shameful that, in the midst of a pandemic, The Lancet published such a misleading paper on a potential early treatment for COVID-19. In order to better understand The Lancet’s actions regarding this study, I request the following:

1. The preservation of all records referring or relating to the study titled,

“Hydroxychloroquine or chloroquine with or without a macrolide for treatment of COVID-19: a multinational registry analysis.”

1. All documents and communications between and among employees or representatives of The Lancet and U.S. government employees referring or relating to the study.
1. All documents and communications between and among The Lancet employees or representatives who reviewed this study, including any comments, ratings, findings and recommendations of the peer reviewers.
1. All documents and communications between and among employees or representatives of The Lancet and individuals or organizations encouraging The Lancet to publish the study.
1. All documents and communications between and among employees or representatives of The Lancet and the study’s authors, or their representatives.
1. All documents and communications between and among employees or representatives of The Lancet and employees or representatives of Surgisphere.

Please provide this information as soon as possible but no later than January 4, 2022. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Ron Johnson

Ranking Member

Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations

December 14, 2021

Dr. Eric Rubin

Editor-in-Chief

New England Journal of Medicine

860 Winter Street

Waltham, MA 02451

Dear Dr. Rubin:

I write to request information regarding the publication and subsequent retraction of a study published in the New England Journal of Medicine (“NEJM”) titled, “Cardiovascular Disease, Drug Therapy, and Mortality in Covid-19” (“the study” or “the paper”). This study, which first appeared in NEJM on May 1, 2020, reportedly found that, “taking certain blood pressure drugs, including angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors, didn’t appear to increase the risk of death among COVID-19 patients, as some researchers had suggested.”

On June 2, 2020, you issued an “expression of concern” regarding the study based on “substantive concerns [that had] been raised about the quality of the information in [the study’s] database.” The company that had provided the database in question was the Surgisphere Corporation (“Surgisphere”), a Chicago-based company, whose owner and founder, Dr. Sapan Desai, coauthored the study.

On June 4, 2020, the authors of the study, including Dr. Desai, published a statement retracting their paper. Shortly after the retraction, you reportedly stated, “[w]e shouldn’t have published this.” Although this questionable study was ultimately retracted, it is concerning and shameful that, in the midst of a pandemic, NEJM published a paper on COVID-19 based on problematic data. In order to better understand NEJM’s actions regarding this study, I request the following:

1. The preservation of all records referring or relating to the study titled, "Cardiovascular Disease, Drug Therapy, and Mortality in Covid-19."

1. All documents and communications between and among employees or representatives of NEJM and U.S. government employees referring or relating to the study.

1. All documents and communications between and among NEJM employees or representatives who reviewed this study, including any comments, ratings, findings and recommendations of the peer reviewers.

1. All documents and communications between and among employees or representatives of NEJM and individuals or organizations encouraging NEJM to publish the study.

1. All documents and communications between and among employees or representatives of NEJM and the study's authors, or their representatives.

1. All documents and communications between and among employees or representatives of NEJM and employees or representatives of Surgisphere.

Please provide this information as soon as possible but no later than January 4, 2022. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Ron Johnson

Ranking Member

Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations