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Open Letter To Nature Medicine

July 26, 2023

Dear Editors:

On March 17, 2020, *Nature Medicine* published a Correspondence entitled “The proximal origin of SARS-CoV-2” (1). The paper assessed the genome sequence of SARS-CoV-2 and concluded, “Our analyses clearly show that SARS-CoV-2 is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus” and “we do not believe that any type of laboratory-based scenario is plausible.”

The paper played an influential role—indeed, the central role—in communicating the false narrative that science established that SARS-CoV-2 entered humans through natural spillover, and not through research-related spillover (2-7). The paper was promoted by Joao Monteiro the chief editor of *Nature Medicine*, as an exceptionally important and definitive research study (“great work”; “will put conspiracy theories about the origin of #SARSCoV2 to rest”; 8). The paper has been cited more than 5,800 times, making it the 68th most cited publication in all fields in 2020, the 16th most cited publication in biology in 2020, and the 8th most cited publication on the subject of COVID-19 in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Email messages and Slack direct messages among authors of the paper obtained under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) process or by the U.S. Congress and publicly released in full in or before July 2023 (2-7), show that the authors did not believe the core conclusions of the paper at the time it was written, at the time it was submitted for publication, and at the time it was published. The authors’ statements show that the paper was, and is, a product of scientific misconduct.

It is imperative that this misleading and damaging product of scientific misconduct be removed from the scientific literature.

We, as STEM and STEM-policy professionals, call upon *Nature Medicine* to publish an expression of editorial concern for the paper and to begin a process of withdrawal or retraction of the paper.

Signers (in alphabetical order)

Amir Attaran, *University of Ottawa*

Paul Babitzke, *Pennsylvania State University*

Alina Chan, *Broad Institute*

Richard H. Ebright, *Rutgers University*

Mohamed E. El Zowalaty, *Higher Colleges of Technology*

David Fisman, *University of Toronto*

Andrew Goffinet, *University of Louvain*

Richard N. Goldstein, *Harvard University*

Elisa D. Harris, *Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland*

Neil L. Harrison, *Columbia University*

Laura Kahn, *One Health Initiative*

Hideki Kakeya, *University of Tsukuba*

Justin B. Kinney, *Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory*

Tatsu Kobayakawa, *National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology*

Yanna Lambrinidou, *Virginia Tech*

Milton Leitenberg, *University of Maryland*

Allen A. Lenoir, *Bioterrorism/Pediatrics Infectious Disease Center*

Jamie Metzl, *Atlantic Council*

David L. Nelson, *Baylor College of Medicine*

Bryce E. Nickels, *Rutgers University*

Takeshi Nitta, *University of Tokyo*

Andrew Noymer, *University of California, Irvine*

Roger Pielke Jr., *University of Colorado, Boulder*

Harish Seshadri, *Indian Institute of Science*

Rick Sheridan, *Emske Phytochem*

Eric S. Starbuck, *Save the Children*

Tyler Stepke, *Johns Hopkins University*

Atsushi Tanaka, *Osaka Medical and Pharmaceutical University*

Hiroshi Tauchi, *Ibaraki University*

Anton van Der Merwe, *University of Oxford*

Alex Washburne, *Selva Analytics*

Andre Watson, *Ligandal*

Roland Wiesendanger, *University of Hamburg*


Susan Wright, *University of Michigan*

References

(1) [Kristian G. Andersen, Andrew Rambaut, W. Ian Lipkin, Edward C. Holmes & Robert F. Garry, The proximal origin of SARS-CoV-2, *Nature Medicine*, volume 26, pages 450–452 \(2020\)](#)

(2) [Interim Majority Staff Report – The Proximal Origin of a Cover-Up: Did the “Bethesda Boys” Downplay a Lab Leak?, July 12, 2023](#)

- (3) [Amid Partisan Politicking, Revelations on a Covid Origins Article, The Nation, July 12, 2023](#)
- (4) [House Republicans Accidentally Released a Trove of Damning Covid Documents, The Intercept, July 12, 2023](#)
- (5) [Top Scientists Misled Congress About Covid Origins, Newly Released Emails And Messages Show, Public, July 18, 2023](#)
- (6) [“So Friggin’ Likely”: New Covid Documents Reveal Unparalleled Media Deception, Racket News, July 18, 2023](#)
- (7) [Covid Origins Scientist Denounces Reporting On His Messages As A “Conspiracy Theory, Public, July 20, 2023](#)
- (8) <https://twitter.com/JMinImmunoland/status/1239966983279366145>



Sign the petition to demand Nature Medicine retract “The proximal origin of SARS-CoV-2”

CLICK HERE to download a searchable PDF file of the Proximal Origins Slack communications.

Source: Covid Origins Scientist Denounces Reporting On His Messages As A “Conspiracy Theory, *Public*, July 20, 2023

PUBLIC COMMENTS [Click here to read all comments](#)

I trained in cell & molecular biology, not virology. Even without a specialist background, it was clear at the time that the reasoning in “Proximal Origins” was faulty on many key points, for example, that “absence of evidence does not equal evidence of absence.”
Recent releases of contemporaneous emails

We need to restore faith in our academic and public health institutions. Fraud and corruption must be pulled out by the roots.

▼
JON B.

The proximal origin paper

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and Slack transcripts show that the manuscript was written for the purpose of deceiving its readership.

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JON M.

“Nature Medicine” and the authors wrote this paper to deliberately mislead the public about the origins of covid. Not only should it be retracted, but all of the so called “journalists” who pretended it was valid need to retract any articles that passed it off as accurate. They knew better.

The ‘Proximal Origin’ paper gives a particularly bad example for flawed science and will continue to mislead the media, politicians, and the public if it will not be retracted soon. The responsibility lies with the journal and its credibility will considerably suffer if the paper will not be retracted.

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The paper was dishonest, politically motivated and bullying.

Politics, not evidence, appears to be the main reason for this paper’s publication. This paper is an embarrassment to the science as an institution. More narrowly Nature’s reputation, it’s most important asset, will be permanently diminished if this paper is not retracted and the academic misconduct behind it

PETER W.

“Nature Medicine” and the authors wrote this paper to deliberately mislead the public about the origins of covid. Not only should it be retracted, but all of the so called “journalists” who pretended it was valid need to retract any articles that passed it off as accurate. They knew better.

This paper was fraudulent as it intentionally misled the public and did immense harm to true scientific inquiry.

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Science is about free and open inquiry. Not narrative fitting. Discovery requires the pursuit of truth. PO

MICHAEL R.

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ought to be retracted on this basis.

CARL H.

Greatest scientific fraud ever.

PEDRO F.

Integrity and the truth matter.

DENNIS O.

The conclusion, a statement of belief, had no place in a scientific paper nor was it supported by the text of the paper itself. Even if a natural origin is eventually demonstrated, nothing will change the fact this paper should never have been published with the conclusion it had, given the information available at the time.

JON S.

fellow scientist.

D.O.

I'm not a fan of rejecting legitimate hypotheses before either proven or disproven. Proximal Origin was written to be used as a bludgeon against critics, to frame all questions about zoonosis as a conspiracy theory. That was deeply intellectually dishonest.

Misinformation around SARS CoV2 is doing untold damage and the scientific community must be part of the solution.

EMILY D.

The truth matters and a cover up of the origins of the virus is an insult to everyone whose lives were affected by the pandemic.

PATRICK M.

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