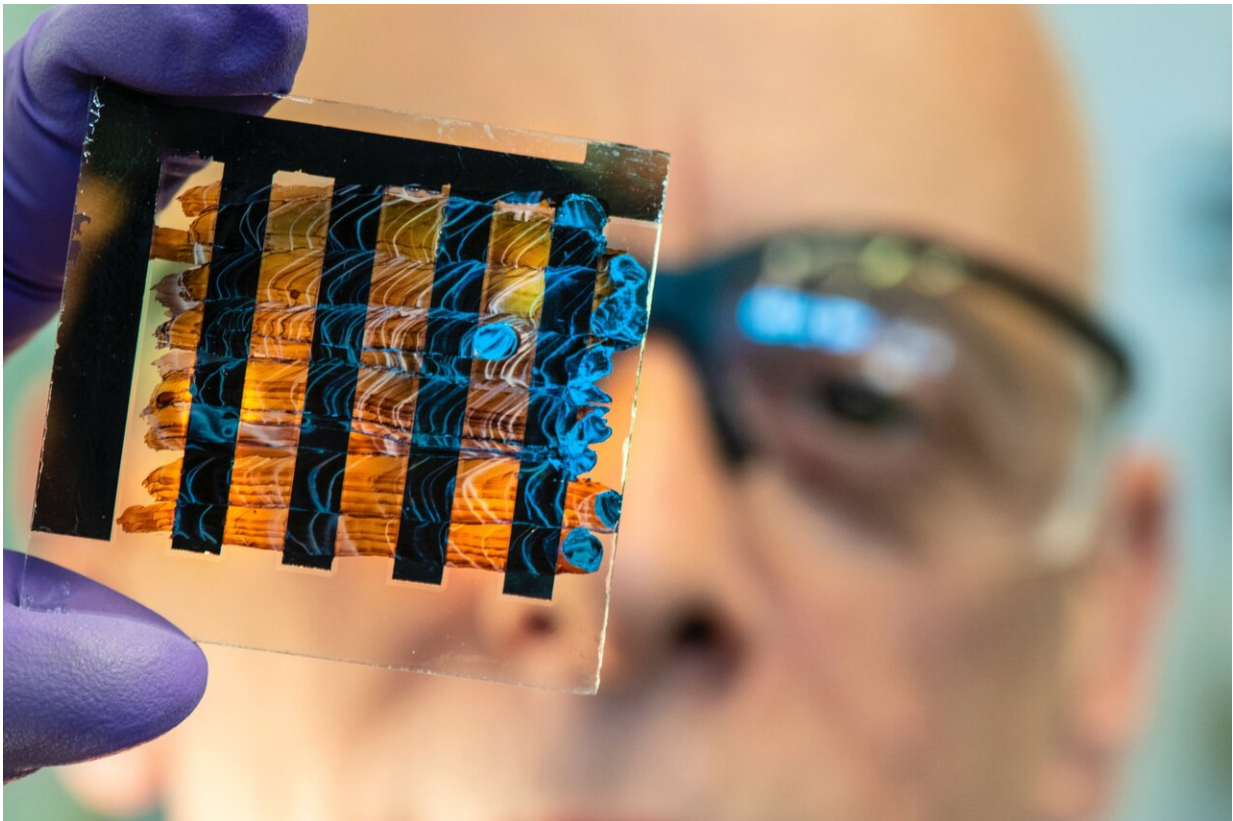


Politicians and governments are suppressing science, argues The BMJ

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Politicians and governments are suppressing science, and when good science is suppressed, people die, argues a senior editor at *The BMJ* today.

Executive editor, Dr. Kamran Abbasi, argues that COVID-19 "has unleashed state corruption on a grand scale, and it is harmful to public health."

Politicians and industry are responsible for this opportunistic embezzlement, he writes. So too are scientists and health experts. "The pandemic has revealed how the medical-political complex can be manipulated in an emergency—a time when it is even more important to safeguard [science](#)."

He points to examples of suppression of science or scientists during the UK's pandemic response, including inappropriate involvement of government advisers in the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), attempts to withhold information on COVID-19 and inequalities, block publication of a study on point-of-care antibody testing for COVID-19, and instruct scientists not to talk to the media.

In the US, President Trump's government manipulated the Food and Drug Administration to hastily approve unproved drugs such as hydroxychloroquine and remdesivir, he adds. Globally, people, policies, and procurement are being corrupted by political and commercial agendas.

Abbasi argues that the UK's pandemic response "relies too heavily on scientists and other government appointees with worrying competing interests, including shareholdings in companies that manufacture COVID-19 [diagnostic tests](#), treatments, and vaccines."

So how might science be safeguarded in these exceptional times?

The first step is full disclosure of competing interests from [government](#), politicians, scientific advisers, and appointees, such as the heads of test and trace, diagnostic test procurement, and vaccine delivery. The next

step is full transparency about decision making systems, processes, and knowing who is accountable for what.

Governments and industry must also stop announcing critical science policy by press release, he adds. "Clear, open, and advance publication of the scientific basis for policy, procurements, and wonder drugs is a fundamental requirement."

Politicians often claim to follow the science, but Abbasi says a better approach is for politicians, the publicly appointed [decision makers](#), to be informed or guided by science when they decide policy for their public.

"Science is a public good. It doesn't need to be followed blindly, but it does need to be fairly considered," he writes.

"Importantly, suppressing science, whether by delaying publication, cherry picking favourable research, or gagging scientists, is a danger to [public health](#) and maladministration of taxpayers' money when entangled with commercial decisions," he argues. "When good science is suppressed, people die."

More information: Kamran Abbasi, Covid-19: politicisation, "corruption," and suppression of science, *BMJ* (2020). [DOI: 10.1136/bmj.m4425](#)

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