Coronavirus as impetus for a lasting change in research culture

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Abstract

The coronavirus outbreak has provoked a dramatic change in research culture. Such changes embody the essence of the scientific enterprise and should be fostered going forward, in order to solve other pressing global problems.

Keywords

COVID-19, coronavirus, sociology of science, open access, open data, social welfare

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The coronavirus outbreak has provoked a dramatic change in research culture (1). Though there is precedent for researcher communities to become more cooperative in times of crisis (2), the present situation lacks an obvious comparator in terms of scale or speed. Scientists across the world are sharing data and preprints of their research at a breakneck pace. Data and findings are being evaluated, debated, and critiqued in near real time. Academic silos are breaking down in the spirit of collaboration and unity. Though there is still work to be done, this mobilization of our collective technical and intellectual resources has greatly improved our understanding of this serious virus. As producers and consumers of scientific research, and more pertinently, as global citizens, we should welcome and encourage such changes to research culture. Indeed, these changes could be said to embody the very essence of the scientific enterprise; whereby scientists are actively and continuously in a state of communal engagement and “focused disputation” with each other’s work (3), in an effort to change the world. But to truly maximize these benefits, such changes, must extend beyond the current context of the coronavirus outbreak. Our world is more interconnected than ever. Global risks (4) and the “grand challenges” of societies (5), including climate change, homelessness, and economic inequality require a level of cooperation that, until now, has been unseen. The response by researchers to the coronavirus outbreak is but one step towards this change.

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