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## SARS-CoV-2 and 'gain of function' research

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To: president@bma.org.uk

Cc: Jay Lippincott <jlippincott@bmj.com>, chair@bma.org.uk, Fiona Godlee <fgodlee@bmj.com>,  
Heidi.Larson@lshtm.ac.uk, zuberp@who.int**For the attention of:**

Emeritus Professor Raanan Gillon

President of the British Medical Association

Dear Professor Gillon, why is SARS-CoV-2 such a major problem, given that other coronaviruses are regarded as common colds?

Is it possible that 'gain of function' research has been undertaken on this virus?

I previously followed the controversial H5N1 research story that emerged in 2012 and am aware that the US National Institutes of Health has funded 'gain of function' research.

I was alarmed in 2013 to listen to an interview re controversial influenza H7N9 gain of function experiments with Vincent Racaniello, Professor of Microbiology and Immunology in the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University, during which he stated:

*So a 'gain of function' simply means that you take a virus and you change it in some way **so it does something new, so it does something that it didn't do before.** That's all that means. It's quite simple. **So you could for example take this H7N9 virus and make it resistant to an anti-viral drug, that would be a gain of function...***

*So, to really understand how this virus works, and really any other virus, **we do gain of function studies all the time. We don't make a big deal of it, we don't write letters telling the world that we're going to do them because that's not the way science works. Science works by just doing your experiments.** We do this because we would like to see what kinds of changes would lead to a gain of function, and what would be the consequences.*

*So, in the case of this virus, **these investigators want to make the virus drug resistant.** As you know, there are a couple of anti-virals that you can use if you get influenza – Tamiflu, Relenza – **and these investigators want to make the virus resistant. And the reason they want to do that is to see if a drug resistant mutant would have any properties that would make it scarier in people.***

*So there is really a goal to these experiments. They want to know if you change the virus what might be the consequences for people. **And as I said this is done all the time but these virologists decided to tell the world about it.***

*(My emphasis.) (Full transcript of interview via [this link](#) to view comments in context.)*

Professor Gillon, **what do you think about this statement from Professor Racaniello, are you concerned 'gain of function' research experiments are done 'all the time'?**

I would appreciate your response on this matter.

Kind regards

**Elizabeth Hart**

Independent citizen investigating conflicts of interest in vaccination policy and the over-use of vaccine products

cc:

Mr Jay Lippincott, Chair, *BMJ*, Non-Executive Director, BMA

Dr Chaand Nagpaul, Council Chair, BMA

Dr Fiona Godlee, Editor in Chief, *The BMJ*

Professor Heidi Larson, The Vaccine Confidence Project

Dr Patrick Zuber, Group Leader WHO Vaccine Safety Team

**Previous emails to Emeritus Professor Raanan Gillon:**

- [Vaccine-induced immunity - What does the future hold if vaccines fail?](#) 4 March 2020
- [Will fast-tracked COVID-19 vaccine products be compulsory?](#) 10 March 2020