



# Implement peer review or resign, controversial journal's editor told

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By [Zoë Corbyn](#)

## Ultimatum spells end for Medical Hypotheses in its current form. Zoë Corbyn reports

The editor of the journal *Medical Hypotheses* has been given until 15 March either to implement changes to adopt a traditional peer-review system, or to resign.

He has also been told that even if he stays with the journal, his contract will not be renewed at the end of the year.

As Times Higher Education reported in January, publisher Elsevier is attempting to rein in its unorthodox journal, which publishes papers on the basis of how interesting or radical they are rather than using peer review, after it published a paper last July that denied the link between HIV and Aids.

The article prompted an outcry from Aids researchers, leading Elsevier to propose changes to both introduce peer review and exclude papers on certain controversial topics.

But Elsevier's plans have been vehemently opposed by the journal's editor, Bruce Charlton, its editorial advisory board and a large number of *Medical Hypotheses'* authors, who have mounted a campaign to save the journal, believing it offers an important outlet for radical ideas.

Professor Charlton said: "Elsevier is asking me either to resign immediately, or else immediately to begin implementing changes that it has unilaterally and irrationally demanded. But my conscience will not allow me... I cannot do either of these things."

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The news comes as two controversial papers on the Aids virus that had been retracted from the journal following the outcry are “permanently withdrawn” after they failed to pass the test of peer review.

The papers in question are “HIV-AIDS hypothesis out of touch with South African AIDS: A new perspective” by Peter Duesberg, professor of molecular and cell biology at the University of California, Berkeley, and a paper published the same month, “AIDS denialism at the ministry of health” by Marco Ruggiero, professor of molecular biology at the University of Florence.

Both papers are being permanently withdrawn from the scientific record, even though the Ruggiero paper does not deny the link between HIV and Aids, but argues that the Italian Ministry of Health seemed not to believe that HIV is the “sole cause” of the Aids virus.

The papers were both rejected unanimously by five anonymous reviewers in a process managed by The Lancet, another Elsevier journal.

But Professor Charlton said he rejected both the process and outcome of this assessment, and accused Elsevier of running a “show trial” and making a “gross mistake”.

“I do not acknowledge the validity of deleting these papers from the scientific literature,” said the professor of theoretical medicine at the University of Buckingham.

“I do not acknowledge the validity of the Elsevier process of reviewing these papers, nor do I consider the referees’ reports relevant to the criteria I use in selecting papers.”

He added that it was “ludicrous” that the Ruggiero paper, which he said was “the opposite of an HIV denialist paper”, had been bracketed with the Duesberg paper.

He said that “since this gross mistake has not been acknowledged”, the evaluation process had not been rigorous enough.

Professor Ruggiero said he believed his paper was “condemned from the very beginning” of the process, “probably because of the word ‘denialism’ in the title”.

Elsevier declined to comment on the developments, saying it was engaged in a “private discussion” with the editor about the future of the journal.

It has previously said that the Duesberg paper contained opinions “that could potentially be damaging to global public health”.

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