

**From:** Iratxe Puebla <>

**Sent:** Thursday, March 17, 2022 1:32 PM

**To:** Marc Edwards <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)>

**Subject:** Re: Concerns raised to the attention of COPE regarding abstract in International Journal of Infectious Diseases

Dear Dr Edwards,

With regard to your enquiry about the feedback COPE provided to the journal, as noted this related to airing concerns about the validity of the conclusions, and the journal's policy on data availability.

The review by the Trustee Board is separate from the follow up by the Facilitation and Integrity subcommittee, as it may include items relating to journal processes that span beyond the individual case reviewed by the subcommittee. As a result, correspondence from the Trustee Board review takes place directly with the journal only.

Sincerely,

Iratxe

Iratxe Puebla

Facilitation and Integrity Officer

Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)

[www.publicationethics.org](http://www.publicationethics.org)

Registered charity No 1123023

Registered in England and Wales, Company No 6389120

Registered office: COPE, New Kings Court, Tollgate, Chandler's Ford, Eastleigh, Hampshire, SO53 3LG, UK

On Thu, Feb 17, 2022 at 12:53 PM <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)> wrote:

We still cannot get an answer to our question: "How many of the people in the study got infected and died BEFORE they were given the filters?"

**Can we get a copy of the COPE follow "up with the journal to provide feedback" about "validity of the conclusions" and "data availability?"**

**Or is that final communication from COPE to the journal confidential?**

Marc

**From:** Iratxe Puebla <[cope\\_assistant@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_assistant@publicationethics.org)>

**Sent:** Thursday, February 17, 2022 3:37 AM

**To:** Marc Edwards <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)>

**Subject:** Concerns raised to the attention of COPE regarding abstract in International Journal of Infectious Diseases

Dear Dr Edwards,

I am writing to you regarding the case you raised with COPE about the abstract in *International Journal of Infectious Diseases* by Maki and colleagues.

As you know, the Facilitation and Integrity subcommittee followed up with the journal about your concerns on several occasions. The editors indicated that they considered the concerns and have published letters to the editor discussing several issues as well as a response by the authors. The journal has also discussed this with the ISID Publication Committee, which supports the editor's view that the published letters adequately alert readers to any concerns and limitations about the study design and conclusions, and that no further action is required.

The Facilitation and Integrity subcommittee referred the case to the COPE Trustee Board for further input and to determine whether further action was needed per [COPE's sanctions policy](#). A group of three Trustee Board members reviewed the matter and determined that the case does not merit a formal sanction. However, COPE followed up with the journal to provide feedback in relation to a couple of aspects of the follow up, in particular in relation to the importance of alerting readers about any concerns about the validity of the conclusions, and the journal's policy and expectations around data availability.

Given that the review by the Trustee Board has been completed, we have taken the process for COPE's review as far as we could and at this point, we are closing the review of the matter. As indicated, we have provided feedback to the journal, and we will also recommend that the *International Journal of Infectious Diseases* completes the COPE journal [audit](#) to evaluate whether there are any other areas of the journal's policies, processes or practice that require attention.

We realize that you may have remaining concerns about aspects of the published abstract. COPE's remit is to educate and support our members, and our review of the matter has been conducted with this goal in mind. Our aim is to make editors and publishers aware of best practice and help them to adhere to that. We are aware that, even after we have done that, there may still be differences in opinion, which we may not be able to resolve despite our best efforts.

Thank you for bringing this matter to the attention of COPE.

With best wishes,

Iratxe Puebla

Facilitation and Integrity Officer

Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)

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Registered office: COPE, New Kings Court, Tollgate, Chandler's Ford, Eastleigh, Hampshire, SO53 3LG, UK

On behalf of

COPE Facilitation and Integrity subcommittee

**Attachment:** [COPE Report.pdf](#)

**From:** [edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu) <>  
**Sent:** Monday, February 14, 2022 12:37 PM  
**To:** 'Iratxe Puebla' <[cope\\_assistant@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_assistant@publicationethics.org)>  
**Cc:** 'Siddhartha Roy' <[sidroy@vt.edu](mailto:sidroy@vt.edu)>; 'Amy Pruden' <[apruden@vt.edu](mailto:apruden@vt.edu)>; 'Prof. Susan Masten' <[masten@egr.msu.edu](mailto:masten@egr.msu.edu)>  
**Subject:** RE: FW: FW: Concerns raised to the attention of COPE

Dear Iratxe,

I have checked my records over the last 3 months and I cannot find any communications on this issue. Can you let us know the status?

Thank you,

Marc

**From:** Iratxe Puebla <[cope\\_assistant@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_assistant@publicationethics.org)>  
**Sent:** Sunday, November 21, 2021 4:12 AM  
**To:** [edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)  
**Cc:** Siddhartha Roy <[sidroy@vt.edu](mailto:sidroy@vt.edu)>; Amy Pruden <[apruden@vt.edu](mailto:apruden@vt.edu)>; Prof. Susan Masten <[masten@egr.msu.edu](mailto:masten@egr.msu.edu)>  
**Subject:** Re: FW: FW: Concerns raised to the attention of COPE

Dear Dr Edwards,

I am writing regarding the case you raised with COPE, apologies for not providing an update earlier.

The information on the case as well as responses we have received from the journal and publisher have been discussed by the Facilitation and Integrity subcommittee at the last subcommittee call. We are preparing a response and I hope to be able to communicate this in the coming weeks.

With best wishes,

Iratxe

Iratxe Puebla

Facilitation and Integrity Officer

Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)

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**From:** [edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu) <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, November 4, 2021 10:25 AM  
**To:** 'Iratxe Puebla' <[cope\\_assistant@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_assistant@publicationethics.org)>  
**Cc:** 'Siddhartha Roy' <[sidroy@vt.edu](mailto:sidroy@vt.edu)>; 'Amy Pruden' <[apruden@vt.edu](mailto:apruden@vt.edu)>; 'Prof. Susan Masten' <[masten@egr.msu.edu](mailto:masten@egr.msu.edu)>  
**Subject:** RE: FW: FW: Concerns raised to the attention of COPE

Hello Iratxe,

Do you have any updates for us?

Even if the case is considered closed, we would appreciate knowing that.

Thank you in advance.

Marc

**From:** edwardsm@vt.edu <edwardsm@vt.edu>  
**Sent:** Monday, August 30, 2021 8:05 AM  
**To:** 'Iratxe Puebla' <cope\_assistant@publicationethics.org>  
**Cc:** 'Siddhartha Roy' <sidroy@vt.edu>; 'Amy Pruden' <apruden@vt.edu>; 'Prof. Susan Masten' <masten@egr.msu.edu>  
**Subject:** RE: FW: FW: Concerns raised to the attention of COPE

Hello Iratxe,

It has been 5 months since our email below and more than 8 months since the last known action on this case. Did the committee provide any further comments on this case?

Another question: Will we be informed when this case is considered closed?

Best Regards,

Marc

**From:** Iratxe Puebla <[cope\\_assistant@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_assistant@publicationethics.org)>  
**Sent:** Sunday, March 21, 2021 6:14 AM  
**To:** Marc Edwards <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)>  
**Subject:** Re: FW: FW: Concerns raised to the attention of COPE

Dear Dr Edwards,

Thank you for your email, I raised it to the attention of the member of the Facilitation and Integrity subcommittee. I am awaiting advice from the subcommittee and I will be in touch as they provide further comments on this case.

With best wishes,

Iratxe  
Iratxe Puebla  
Facilitation and Integrity Officer  
Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)  
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UK

On Fri, Mar 19, 2021 at 2:49 PM <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)> wrote:

Hi Iratxe,

Is there any kind of update? Is IJID's complete refusal to address our legitimate questions about the alleged deaths reported in this manuscript, considered acceptable?

Marc

**From:** Iratxe Puebla <[cope\\_assistant@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_assistant@publicationethics.org)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 12, 2021 2:58 AM  
**To:** Marc Edwards <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)>  
**Subject:** Re: FW: FW: Concerns raised to the attention of COPE

Dear Dr Edwards,

Thank you for your response, I have raised it to the attention of the member of the Facilitation and Integrity subcommittee.

With best wishes,

Iratxe  
Iratxe Puebla  
Facilitation and Integrity Officer  
Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)  
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Registered charity No 1123023  
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Registered office: COPE, New Kings Court, Tollgate, Chandler's Ford, Eastleigh, Hampshire, SO53 3LG,  
UK

On Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 4:52 AM <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)> wrote:

Hi Iratxe,

We have reviewed the new current letter.

As far as we can tell, the wording of that new response, is almost exactly the same as the original response in the attached letter of May 7, 2020, In that letter, IJID claimed that they answered my questions and concerns because:

*The committee believes that adequate steps were taken to address these concerns as outlined in the author response published in the IJID (please see attached). The authors addressed the question about the study design, outcomes and limitations.*

COPE decided that the cited letter to the editor exchange, did not adequately address our many specific legitimate questions about the generalized conclusion of the research. After IJID was informed that this was inadequate, we waited months and months, and now IJID still refers to the same letter to the editor

exchange as the complete response. Not one of our many specific questions submitted to the authors about the study has been answered. Including the timing of the human deaths that resulted from the study relative to the time that filters were installed.

Our questions about ethical oversight were also not addressed. It appears that they simply asked Henry Ford IRB, and were given the same answer that Henry Ford gave me more than 1 year ago (see attached letter).

*“ Like all research conducted at Henry Ford Health System, this study by Dr. Marcus Zervos was thoroughly reviewed and approved by our Institutional Review Board. The IRB determined the study was appropriately designed and was in compliance with all required federal research guidelines as well as with all Henry Ford research policies and procedures.”*

If it were normal circumstances we would accept that.

But we still do not see how any IRB could approve a study reaching a generalized conclusion about the safety of water filters or Legionnaires' disease deaths, with 50% death rate, without appropriate control samples or study design. The abstract conclusion is ludicrous on its face. We have long suspected that many of the patients were infected before the filters were installed, and that the deaths and diseases likely have nothing to do with the filters at all. If so, it would be wrong to imply or state that this was the case.

We also have the uncomfortable fact, that the Henry Ford ethics office, unethically disclosed my name to Dr. Zervos, within 24 hours of our submitting initial questions about the IRB approval to Henry Ford. His angry letter sent to many people at my institution within 24 hours (with a long list of ethical allegations against me), revealed that he was told by Henry Ford ethics personnel about our question.

We would sincerely like an unbiased third party to review the ethics of the original “approved” study design, and confirm that it was followed as presented by data in the abstract, including the “result” of the 50% death rate.

Marc

**From:** Iratxe Puebla <[cope\\_assistant@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_assistant@publicationethics.org)>  
**Sent:** Sunday, January 10, 2021 5:08 AM  
**To:** Marc Edwards <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)>  
**Cc:** Britta Lassmann ([britta.lassmann@isid.org](mailto:britta.lassmann@isid.org)) <[britta.lassmann@isid.org](mailto:britta.lassmann@isid.org)>  
**Subject:** Concerns raised to the attention of COPE

Dear Dr Edwards,

I am writing to you regarding your concerns about the abstract in the *International Journal of Infectious Diseases* by Maki and colleagues.

As you are aware, COPE asked the Society for Infectious Diseases to comment on some remaining concerns about the follow up on the abstract. We have received a response from the ISID Publication Committee of the International Society for Infectious Diseases which I am attaching to this email.

If you would like to comment on this response, please let me know and I'll share your comments with the member of the Facilitation and Integrity subcommittee.

With best wishes,

Iratxe

Iratxe Puebla

Facilitation and Integrity Officer

Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)

[www.publicationethics.org](http://www.publicationethics.org)



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<http://www.isid.org>

**October 20, 2020**

**Ms. Iratxe Puebla**

**Facilitation and Integrity Officer**

**Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)**

Dear Ms. Puebla,

On behalf of ISID’s Publication Committee, please allow me to clarify the journal’s actions to date regarding your two points of remaining concern:

1. *Re: “...it appears that lack of clarity remains about the time at which the infections took place relative to the water filter usage and the cause of death for the patients reported in the abstract.”*

The journal sought and received clarification from the authors, which was included in the published response. The journal was satisfied with the authors’ response and considers that readers have been appropriately informed and can draw their own conclusions from the data. The conference abstract is now linked to the letter so readers can easily find the resulting discussion when reading the original abstract. If there is new information that readers of the journal need to be aware of, we would be happy to consider further scientific correspondence.

2. *Re: “We also feel that it is important for the journal to reassure itself about the ethical oversight and approval for the study.”*

The journal had received reassurance regarding ethical approval and oversight from Dr Margot LaPointe, Vice President of Research at Henry Ford that the study was thoroughly reviewed and approved by the Henry Ford Institutional Review Board and that it complied with federal requirements, as well as Henry Ford policies and procedures.

The ISID Publication Committee hopes that these responses address Dr. Edwards remaining concerns.

With kind regards,

Britta Lassmann, MD

Program Director

On 11/28/2020 10:41 AM, [edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu) wrote:

Dear Iratxe,

Am we allowed to have an update of the status of this case. We were told, in writing, that IJID would be sending a response to COPE no later than 10/15/2020.

It is now 1.5 months after that date.

Did they indeed send a response in a timely manner, or are they continuing to claim there is nothing they can do to get our legitimate scientific questions answered.

Best Regards,  
Marc

**From:** [edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu) <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, October 29, 2020 2:12 PM  
**To:** [britta.lassmann@isid.org](mailto:britta.lassmann@isid.org)  
**Cc:** [cope\\_assistant@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_assistant@publicationethics.org)  
**Subject:** RE: FW: Concerns raised to the attention of COPE

Hello Britta,

Is it possible to give me an update, or at least tell me that IJID is going to do nothing?

Marc

**From:** [edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu) <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 20, 2020 12:55 PM  
**To:** [britta.lassmann@isid.org](mailto:britta.lassmann@isid.org)  
**Cc:** [cope\\_assistant@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_assistant@publicationethics.org)  
**Subject:** FW: FW: Concerns raised to the attention of COPE

Hello Britta,

Am I allowed to see the IJID committee's response due October 15?

Marc

**From:** [edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu) <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 8, 2020 12:25 PM  
**To:** 'Britta Lassmann' <[britta.lassmann@isid.org](mailto:britta.lassmann@isid.org)>; 'Iratxe Puebla' <[cope\\_assistant@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_assistant@publicationethics.org)>  
**Cc:** 'Paul Tambyah' <[paul\\_anantharajah\\_tambyah@nuhs.edu.sg](mailto:paul_anantharajah_tambyah@nuhs.edu.sg)>; [c.fennell@elsevier.com](mailto:c.fennell@elsevier.com); 'Eskild Petersen' <[eskild.petersen@gmail.com](mailto:eskild.petersen@gmail.com)>  
**Subject:** RE: Concerns raised to the attention of COPE

To remind everyone of the timeline, we first raised questions about this paper in March 2019, and then again in October 2019.

In October Dr. Petersen claimed that the authors promised to answer our questions about a 50% death rate, as a result of using the Federal and State government supplied humanitarian filters, and also the ethics of a study design with 1 dubious control sample to draw a generalizable public health conclusion.

Nearly a year later, we do not yet have a single answer, to even a single basic legitimate question we posed a year ago.

The damage to humanitarian provision of POU filters to consumers, arising from this abstract and its dissemination, cannot now be undone.

The longer the basic science behind the alleged deaths, study design and its ethics go unaddressed, the more and more damage that is done.

While I am glad that IJID now has a plan, to get a plan, this process with IJID has been very frustrating.

Marc

**From:** Britta Lassmann <[britta.lassmann@isid.org](mailto:britta.lassmann@isid.org)>

**Sent:** Tuesday, September 8, 2020 10:53 AM

**To:** Iratxe Puebla <[cope\\_assistant@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_assistant@publicationethics.org)>

**Cc:** Paul Tambyah <[paul\\_anantharajah\\_tambyah@nuhs.edu.sg](mailto:paul_anantharajah_tambyah@nuhs.edu.sg)>; [c.fennell@elsevier.com](mailto:c.fennell@elsevier.com); [edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu);

Eskild Petersen <[eskild.petersen@gmail.com](mailto:eskild.petersen@gmail.com)>

**Subject:** Re: Concerns raised to the attention of COPE

Dear Ms. Publa,

I am confirming receipt of your email requesting additional steps to address the concerns raised by Dr. Edwards. This will be presented at the next meeting of ISID's Publication Committee. **I will be able to get back to you with the Committee's response by October 15, 2020.** Please let me know if this timeline is agreeable.

I look forward to resolving these additional concerns.

With kind regards,

Britta Lassmann, MD

Program Director

International Society for Infectious Diseases

[www.isid.org](http://www.isid.org)

[www.promedmail.org](http://www.promedmail.org)



**From:** Iratxe Puebla <[cope\\_assistant@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_assistant@publicationethics.org)>  
**Date:** Wednesday, August 26, 2020 at 2:56 AM  
**To:** Britta Lassmann <[britta.lassmann@isid.org](mailto:britta.lassmann@isid.org)>  
**Cc:** Paul Tambyah <[paul\\_anantharajah\\_tambyah@nuhs.edu.sg](mailto:paul_anantharajah_tambyah@nuhs.edu.sg)>, "[c.fennell@elsevier.com](mailto:c.fennell@elsevier.com)" <[c.fennell@elsevier.com](mailto:c.fennell@elsevier.com)>, "[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)" <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)>, Eskild Petersen <[eskild.petersen@gmail.com](mailto:eskild.petersen@gmail.com)>  
**Subject:** Re: Concerns raised to the attention of COPE

Dear Dr Lassmann,

Thank you for your letter in relation to COPE's request for comments on Marc Edwards' concerns about the abstract in *International Journal of Infectious Diseases* by Maki and colleagues.

We would like to first of all clarify that in relation to the disclosure of Dr Edwards' identity to the authors of the abstract (concern 2 in your letter), we received clarification that Dr Edwards' identity was known to the authors prior to the editor's follow up and thus, we would like to confirm that we do not have concerns about the journal's handling of this item. We are sorry about any confusion in relation to this point.

We have reviewed your letter and remain concerned about the lack of specific follow up on the concerns raised about the content of the published abstract (concern 1 in the letter).

We understand that the journal has published two Letters to the Editor in response to the abstract, at the same time, it appears that lack of clarity remains about the time at which the infections took place relative to the water filter usage and the cause of death for the patients reported in the abstract. This is important information required for the interpretation of the results and conclusions, and we feel that the journal has a duty to pursue those clarifications with the authors, separate from the discussion that has taken place via the Letters to the Editor. We also feel that it is important for the journal to reassure itself about the ethical oversight and approval for the study. Given the public health implications of the findings reported, we feel that the journal has a duty to fully clarify these items in order to establish if the abstract can stand or any updates to the record are required.

We feel that the lack of comprehensive follow up on these aspects deviates from the expectations per the COPE Core Practices.

We would expect the journal to pursue further follow up with the authors to request clear and comprehensive information on the time at which the infections took place relative to the water filter usage and the cause of death for the patients. We would also expect the journal to request that the authors provide the documentation for the study protocol and ethical approval for the study. Upon receipt of the information, the editors should evaluate whether the conclusions of the abstract stand or whether any corrections to the record are needed.

We therefore request that the journal takes these additional steps with the authors to address the concerns raised about the abstract, and that the journal let us know what steps are planned, and when those have been implemented. If the journal opts not to pursue such further follow up, we will consider that the process is not aligned to COPE's Core Practices and we will have to raise the case to the COPE Trustee Board for consideration under the COPE sanctions framework.

We would be grateful if you could confirm by September 15 the steps the journal will take to address COPE's request.

We look forward to hearing from you.

With best wishes,

Iratxe Puebla  
Facilitation and Integrity Officer  
Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)  
[www.publicationethics.org](http://www.publicationethics.org)

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UK

On behalf of  
COPE Facilitation and Integrity subcommittee

On Fri, May 8, 2020 at 4:41 PM Britta Lassmann <[britta.lassmann@isid.org](mailto:britta.lassmann@isid.org)> wrote:

Dear Ms. Puebla,

Thank you very much for the follow up. I am looking forward to hearing back from the COPE Facilitation and Integrity subcommittee with guidance to resolve Dr. Edward's remaining concerns.

With best wishes,

Britta

Britta Lassmann, MD

Program Director

International Society for Infectious Diseases

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<http://www.isid.org>

Ms. Iratxe Puebla  
Facilitation and Integrity Officer  
Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)

Dear Ms. Puebla,

I am getting back to you on behalf of ISID's Publication Committee in response to your email to the IJID Editor Eskild Petersen dated April 19, 2020. The IJID is published on behalf of the International Society for Infectious Diseases (ISID) by our publisher, Elsevier.

The committee and I have reviewed your email and previous correspondences. It is the committee's understanding that the item in question is an abstract (not a full article) that was presented at the International Meeting on Emerging Diseases and Surveillance (IMED) in 2018. Congress abstracts are limited to 350 words and are peer-reviewed through ISID. The abstract review and selection process is overseen by the respective Congress Organizing Committee. Through an agreement with the IJID and the journal publisher Elsevier, abstracts accepted for presentation at any of the Society's international meetings are published as special supplements to the IJID without further review process through the journal. ISID's Publication Committee will therefore take over further correspondence and handling of Dr. Edward's concerns.

Specifically, the committee would like to respond to your inquiries below:

*COPE Concern 1: You indicate that the journal has now published two Letters to the Editor discussing concerns about the published abstract. However, it does not appear that the journal has taken steps to address the actual concerns about the information reported in the abstract, specifically, in relation to the time at which the infections took place relative to the water filter usage, the cause of death for the patients, and the questions around ethical oversight and approval for the study. As we indicated in earlier correspondence, it is the editor's duty to follow up on those items in relation to the published content, in order to establish whether any corrections to the record are required for the abstract. We feel that the lack of follow up on the specific concerns noted about the abstract deviates from the expectations per the COPE Core Practices.*

The committee believes that adequate steps were taken to address these concerns as outlined in the author response published in the IJID (please see attached). The authors addressed the question about the study design, outcomes and limitations. Authors report the following ethical approval:

Henry Ford IRB Approval (HFHS #12383). Ethical approval was also confirmed by Dr. Margot LaPointe, Vice President of Research at Henry Ford in a correspondence between Dr. Marc Edwards and Dr. Margot LaPoint which Dr. Edwards shared previously and which is copied here: “*Like all research conducted at Henry Ford Health System, this study by Dr. Marcus Zervos was thoroughly reviewed and approved by our Institutional Review Board. The IRB determined the study was appropriately designed and was in compliance with all required federal research guidelines as well as with all Henry Ford research policies and procedures.*”

COPE concern 2: *We understand that as part of the journal’s process, Dr Edwards’ identity was disclosed to the authors of the abstract. The COPE guidelines for responding to whistle blowers indicate that ‘Sometimes the whistle blower may prefer to remain anonymous. It is important not to try to “out” people who wish to be anonymous’:*[https://publicationethics.org/files/RespondingToWhistleblowers\\_ConcernsRaisedDirectly.pdf](https://publicationethics.org/files/RespondingToWhistleblowers_ConcernsRaisedDirectly.pdf). *COPE considers it inappropriate to disclose the identity of a reader who has raised a concern, rather, it is the editor’s responsibility to shield the identity of the individual who raised the concern. We require some further context from you on the circumstances that led to the sharing of Dr Edwards’ information with the author of the article.*

While the Committee encourages open, transparent scientific exchange and discourse, we understand that situations might arise where individuals request to remain anonymous. Could you please provide the committee with further context and information on Dr. Edward’s request to remain anonymous?

The committee hopes to be able to resolve Dr. Edward’s concerns and is looking forward to COPE’s continued guidance.

With kind regards,



Britta Lassmann, MD  
Program Director  
International Society for Infectious Diseases

**ISID Publication Committee**

Chair: Paul Tambyah (Singapore)  
Rashad Abdul-Ghani (Yemen)  
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Ira Praharaj (India)  
Sean Wasserman (South Africa)  
Gonzalo Bearman (USA)  
Shaheen Mehtar (South Africa)

**From:** Iratxe Puebla <[cope\\_assistant@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_assistant@publicationethics.org)>  
**Sent:** Sunday, April 19, 2020 4:52 AM  
**To:** Eskild Petersen <[eskind.petersen@gmail.com](mailto:eskind.petersen@gmail.com)>  
**Cc:** Fennell, Catriona (ELS-AMS) <[c.fennell@elsevier.com](mailto:c.fennell@elsevier.com)>; Marc Edwards <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)>  
**Subject:** Concerns raised to the attention of COPE

Dear Dr Petersen,

Many thanks again for your response to our request for comments on Marc Edwards' concerns about the abstract in *International Journal of Infectious Diseases* by Maki and colleagues.

We have reviewed your response and the information provided thus far regarding the journal's follow up and we remain concerned about a couple of aspects of the journal's handling of the case:

- 1) You indicate that the journal has now published two Letters to the Editor discussing concerns about the published abstract. However, it does not appear that the journal has taken steps to address the actual concerns about the information reported in the abstract, specifically, in relation to the time at which the infections took place relative to the water filter usage, the cause of death for the patients, and the questions around ethical oversight and approval for the study. As we indicated in earlier correspondence, it is the editor's duty to follow up on those items in relation to the published content, in order to establish whether any corrections to the record are required for the abstract. We feel that the lack of follow up on the specific concerns noted about the abstract deviates from the expectations per the COPE Core Practices.
  
- 2) We understand that as part of the journal's process, Dr Edwards' identity was disclosed to the authors of the abstract. The COPE guidelines for responding to whistle blowers indicate that *'Sometimes the whistle blower may prefer to remain anonymous. It is important not to try to "out" people who wish to be anonymous'*:  
[https://publicationethics.org/files/RespondingToWhistleblowers\\_ConcernsRaisedDirectly.pdf](https://publicationethics.org/files/RespondingToWhistleblowers_ConcernsRaisedDirectly.pdf). COPE considers it inappropriate to disclose the identity of a reader who has raised a concern, rather, it is the editor's responsibility to shield the identity of the individual who raised the concern. We require some further context from you on the circumstances that led to the sharing of Dr Edwards' information with the author of the article.

Having considered the information that you provided, we feel that the journal has not addressed the two aspects noted above in a manner consistent with COPE expectations. We would have expected a response that indicated the journal would pursue the necessary clarifications about the published abstract with the authors, as well as a request for the relevant ethical approval documentation for the study. We also expect some clarification on the circumstances that led to Dr Edwards' identity to be disclosed with the authors.

Can you please confirm with us what steps the journal will take to follow up on the two areas of concern we have outlined above?

We would appreciate receiving your response by **May 8, 2020**. We will review the information you provide and if concerns remain at that stage, we will refer the case to the COPE Trustee Board to consider further actions under the framework of the COPE [sanctions policy](#).

We look forward to hearing from you.

With best wishes,

Iratxe Puebla  
Facilitation and Integrity Officer

Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)  
[www.publicationethics.org](http://www.publicationethics.org)

**From:** Iratxe Puebla <[cope\\_assistant@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_assistant@publicationethics.org)>

**Sent:** Tuesday, February 18, 2020 2:06 AM

**To:** Eskild Petersen <[eskild.petersen@gmail.com](mailto:eskild.petersen@gmail.com)>

**Cc:** Fennell, Catriona (ELS-AMS) <[c.fennell@elsevier.com](mailto:c.fennell@elsevier.com)>; Marc Edwards <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)>

**Subject:** Concerns raised to the attention of COPE regarding abstract in International Journal of Infectious Diseases

Dear Dr Petersen,

Many thanks for your response to our request for comments on the concerns that Marc Edwards raised in relation to the abstract in *International Journal of Infectious Diseases* by Maki and colleagues.

We have reviewed the information you provided and Dr Edwards' concerns, and we understand that Dr Edwards has remaining concerns about the information reported in the abstract, in particular, in relation the claim that five patients died during the study.

Given that the abstract was published in *International Journal of Infectious Diseases*, we view it within the journal's responsibility to clarify whether the reported finding about patient deaths is accurate, or to consider a Correction to the abstract record if this were to be necessary to ensure readers can accurately interpret the findings from the work.

If this has not been done already, it would seem important that the journal requests the following from the authors:

- Information on when the infections took place relative to the water filter usage, and clarification about the cause of death for the patients.
- Documentation attesting to ethical approval for the study issued by their local institutional review board. The COPE guidelines recommend requesting this documentation when an ethical concern is identified about a study.

Could you please confirm whether you will pursue these further clarifications from the authors and provide us with an update once those are received?

Many thanks in advance. We look forward to hearing from you.

With best wishes,

Iratxe Puebla  
Facilitation and Integrity Officer  
Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)  
[www.publicationethics.org](http://www.publicationethics.org)

**From:** Iratxe Puebla <[cope\\_assistant@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_assistant@publicationethics.org)>  
**Sent:** Sunday, January 26, 2020 5:58 AM  
**To:** Marc Edwards <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)>  
**Cc:** Eskild Petersen <[eskind.petersen@gmail.com](mailto:eskind.petersen@gmail.com)>; Fennell, Catriona (ELS-AMS) <[c.fennell@elsevier.com](mailto:c.fennell@elsevier.com)>  
**Subject:** Re: Concerns raised to the attention of COPE regarding abstract in International Journal of Infectious Diseases

Dear Dr Edwards,

Thank you for your response, I have raised it to the attention of the member of the Facilitation and Integrity subcommittee who is reviewing the case and I will be in touch in due course.

With best wishes,

Iratxe

Iratxe Puebla  
Facilitation and Integrity Officer  
Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)  
[www.publicationethics.org](http://www.publicationethics.org)

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On Sun, Jan 19, 2020 at 8:34 PM <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)> wrote:

The key published "result" of the IJID abstract was that 5/10 patients died during the study. This is certainly alarming.

In the letter to editor exchange Eskild describes (attached), this conclusion was questioned by other readers, and the authors cryptically evaded explaining the reported deaths as follows:

***".....only patients with suspected infections from waterborne pathogens were invited to participate. Water samples were collected entering and leaving activated carbon block (ACB) point-of-use (PoU) filters, and from showers. No filter cartridges were tested. In neither the abstract nor the poster did we draw conclusions about deaths; rather, this information only characterized the status of participants."***

When I first corresponded with Eskild, he told me the authors promised to answer all my questions. I submitted my reasonable questions in writing, requesting information about when the patient's deaths occurred, relative to when the filters were installed, and other basic information. These were simple questions about the study design and the implication of cause and effect, and the alleged "important implications" of their study. The authors refused to answer the questions I submitted.

**Eskild claimed in writing, that if they refuse to answer basic questions about the deaths, that IJID has no ability to force them to answer, or to force them to clarify their results.** That is when I came to you. Months and months later, the authors have still refused to answer the basic questions I answered. And I assume that Eskild thinks he and IJID have no ability to compel them to answer my questions, or to clarify their "results" about patients dying. So they won't.

Notice that these authors now claim that in the abstract or poster, they did not "**draw conclusions about deaths,**" but that "**this information only characterized the status of the participants.**" I am more perplexed than ever. How can I write a letter to the editor, if I do not even know if the patients were dead or infected, before the filters were installed?

As near as I can tell, they are claiming they went and sampled the homes of some patients that they suspected had waterborne disease, but I don't even know what year they contracted the disease, what the disease was, and how does that disease relate those caused by the pathogens they found on the POU filters in Flint? If they just went and sampled the homes of patients who died or who were near death, shouldn't that timeline be explicit, so as to avoid alarmist conclusions and misleading readers?

The authors and their institution have refused to produce the IRB approved study plan as we requested. They have now claimed in writing that they had an approved IRB plan. If asked, our institutions would produce the study plan, so that the weighing of the benefits and detriments of the study could be determined, along with respect for the rights of patients, and details would be provided of the study design.

So at this point I will just focus on that. I have basic questions on the study design and data interpretation, and the published "result" that 5/10 patients died from the study. The authors have refused to answer those questions, and now seem to be saying, that the deaths of 5/10 patients are not a "conclusion." At a minimum their "result" about the deaths is misleading. If some of the patients were dead or dying before the study was started or designed, I consider their "result" to be a complete fabrication.

Marc

**From:** Iratxe Puebla <[cope\\_assistant@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_assistant@publicationethics.org)>

**Sent:** Sunday, January 19, 2020 3:53 AM

**To:** Marc Edwards <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)>

**Cc:** Eskild Petersen <[eskind.petersen@gmail.com](mailto:eskind.petersen@gmail.com)>; Fennell, Catriona (ELS-AMS) <[c.fennell@elsevier.com](mailto:c.fennell@elsevier.com)>

**Subject:** Concerns raised to the attention of COPE regarding abstract in International Journal of Infectious Diseases

Dear Dr Edwards,

I am writing to follow up on the concerns you raised to COPE's attention regarding the abstract in *International Journal of Infectious Diseases* by Maki *et al.*

As you are aware, we approached the editor Dr Petersen for comments on your concerns. We received a response from the editor in which they shared correspondence with you dated 30 October 2019 about this case. The editor has indicated that he has previously discussed the concerns with you and that the journal's position is that this is a matter that should be pursued with the authors of the abstract and their institution, and that this is not a matter the journal can adjudicate.

The editor has also indicated that the journal has received a letter to the editor airing similar concerns and that they intend to publish that letter. The editor further indicated that he would be willing to publish a letter to the editor from you, and to invite the authors to respond; if they opt not to, he indicated that the journal would publish a statement after your letter saying that they invited the authors to comment but they did not receive a reply.

At this stage, we welcome your comments on the editor's response and whether this sufficiently addresses your concerns. Remember that COPE seeks to facilitate disagreements, but that COPE is not a governing body.

If you have remaining concerns about the published abstract, we would be grateful if you could please provide some further comments on the following items to help us establish whether and how the concerns relate to our Facilitation and Integrity framework:

- You previously indicated concerns that the study's conclusions may be fabricated. If you have remaining concerns on this, can you please further elaborate on the basis for this concern? Specifically, why do you believe the integrity of the conclusions is in question?
- You earlier also questioned whether the IRB process was adequately followed for this study. If you have remaining concerns, might you explain the specific basis for your concern? What you earlier shared ("We can guarantee that the IRB's of our institutions would never approve or allow such a study") seemed speculative. Do you have any information from the institution on this?

Thank you for your time, we look forward to hearing from you.

With best wishes,

Iratxe Puebla  
Facilitation and Integrity Officer  
Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)  
[www.publicationethics.org](http://www.publicationethics.org)

**Letter to the Editor:****Bacterial Colonization in Point of Use Filters and Deaths in Flint, Michigan**

Hernan F. Gomez, MD (1), Dominic A. Borgialli, DO, MPH (1), Mahesh Sharman, MD (2), Anthony J Scolpino, BS (3), James M. Oleske, MD, MPH (3), John D Bogden, PhD (4)

The study by Maki G et al. (1) examines the effects of point of use (PoU) filters on bacterial infections. The authors note that 12 pathogens (including *P. aeruginosa*) were detected in PoU filters in 10 Flint homes— with residents of 7 of the 10 homes in Flint reported as having severe pneumonia (1). That residents of 70% of homes in Flint with PoU filters had severe respiratory infections is alarming enough. However, the authors then report a mortality rate of 50% (5 of the 10 patients died) in Flint homes utilizing PoU filters (1). This is an astounding result, but the authors offer no scientific explanation of how PoU filters could have caused the cited deaths and infections.

As researchers and clinicians based in Flint and Newark, we have concerns regarding the appropriate implementation of controls in this study. We note for example, that only 10 Flint homes with PoU filters were studied—and of the Detroit controls, only one home had a PoU filter. It is not possible to discern if PoU filters in Detroit might have had similar colonization rates, much less come to any conclusion regarding causality for deaths due to the colonization. A control of one is not adequate for rigorous research. The Flint population is a vulnerable population that deserves well-designed research that can be used to provide its residents with valid advice about their drinking water (2).

Maki G et al. (1) note that PoU filters are recommended and are successful in reducing lead exposure in drinking water. We agree. They have been recommended by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for all households residing in the Flint boundary (3). A field study was conducted to test the effectiveness of faucet mounted PoU water filters for removing high concentrations of lead in drinking water from home plumbing sources and lead service lines (4). Properly installed PoU filters can protect all populations, including pregnant women and children, by reducing lead in drinking water to levels that would not result in a significant overall lead exposure (4).

The EPA continues to recommend that Flint residents use National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) certified filters in their homes to remove lead (3). The City of Flint provides water for a population of 96,448 within its boundaries. Flint residents used 2,866,888 centum cubic feet of water in 2018 (5). A fifty percent mortality rate in a population of 96,448 would clearly be unacceptable. We note that even a five percent mortality rate would result in the deaths of 4,882 persons in Flint and would call for an immediate cessation of use of PoU filters to prevent a catastrophe from filters colonized with lethal infectious organisms.

However, If the study with only one control that was published in this journal serves to dissuade residents from utilizing PoU filters, we will see a vulnerable Flint population afraid to protect itself from lead exposure by stopping appropriate and recommended PoU filter use. This publication has not been peer reviewed by experts in the field, yet avoidance of filters may already be taking place given the results of the study have been publicized in a PBS website and broadcast recently in the PBS program Frontline (6) with extensive national news coverage of this program (7).

**Affiliations:**

1Department of Emergency Medicine, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor and Department of Emergency Medicine, Hurley Medical Center, Flint, Michigan.

2 Department of Pediatrics, Michigan State University College of Human Medicine, Hurley Medical Center, Flint, MI.

3 Department of Pediatrics, Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, Newark, NJ.

4 Department of Microbiology, Biochemistry, and Molecular Genetics, Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, Newark, NJ.

**Address correspondence to:** Hernan F. Gomez, Department of Emergency Medicine, Hurley Medical Center, One Hurley Plaza, Flint, Michigan, 48503-5993, hfgx@umich.edu, 810-262-9854.

**Financial Disclosure:** Not applicable, this is a letter— thus no funding was secured

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose

#### References:

1. Maki G, McElmurry S, Kilgore P, Love N, Misikir H, Perri M, Zervous M. Bacterial colonization of drinking water: implications for an aging U.S. water infrastructure. *Int J Infect Dis*. 2019; 79 (S1) 30-31.
2. Shivayogi P. Vulnerable population and methods for their safeguard. *Perspect Clin Res* 2013; 4 (1):53-57.
3. EPA—Flint Drinking Water FAQs. Available at <https://www.epa.gov/flint/flint-drinkingwater-faqs>. Retrieved October 23, 2019.
4. Bosscher V, Lytle DA, Schock MR, Porter A, Del Toral, M. POU water filters effectively reduce lead in drinking water: a demonstration field study in Flint, Michigan. *J Environ Sci Health*. 2019; 54 (5): 484-493
5. City of Flint comprehensive annual financial report for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2018 [p. 6–20]. Available at: <https://www.cityofflint.com/wp-content/uploads/City-of-Flint-CAFR-FY18-6-30-18.pdf>. Retrieved October 23, 2019.
6. Flint’s Deadly Water: The EPA Says Flint’s Water is Safe—Scientists Aren’t So Sure. Available at: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/epa-says-flints-water-is-safe-scientists-arent-so-sure/>. Retrieved October 24, 2019.
7. There may have been dozens more deaths linked to the Flint water crisis than previously known. Available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/09/12/there-may-have-been-dozens-more-deaths-linked-flint-water-crisis-than-previously-disclosed/>. Retrieved October 27, 2019.

#### Author Response:

The abstract by Maki et al. (2019) contained limited information from a poster presented in a late-breaking session at the Seventh International Meeting on Emerging Diseases and Surveillance. The work had IRB approval (HFHS #12383), and informed consent was obtained prior to collecting samples.

The small sample size (n = 10) was clearly not intended to be representative of the Flint community, and only patients with suspected infections from waterborne pathogens were invited to participate. Water samples were collected entering and leaving activated carbon block (ACB) point-of-use (PoU) filters, and from showers. No filter cartridges were tested. In neither the abstract nor the poster did we draw conclusions about deaths; rather, this information only characterized the status of participants. Importantly, species of bacteria known to include pathogens were cultured from many water samples leaving the filters.

There are many unknowns about the microbiology of ACB PoU filters, especially when they are deployed in aged, under-maintained distribution systems (as in Flint, MI). Importantly, these filters have been shown to remove lead, and they effectively reduced lead exposure in Flint (e.g., US, 2016). Also, importantly, studies have shown these filters support bacterial growth, including opportunistic pathogens (Geldreich et al., 1985, Chaidez and Gerba, 2004), although lab studies cast uncertainty about long-term pathogen colonization (e.g., Reasoner et al., 1987).

Prior microbial studies all show that filters change the abundance and composition of bacteria (including opportunistic pathogens) in filtered water relative to distributed water. Furthermore, studies show that multiple variables influence the microbiological quality of filtered water in unpredictable ways (e.g., Reasoner et al., 1987, Rollinger and Dott, 1987). Consequently, many unknowns about the microbial colonization of ACB PoU filters remain. This helps explain why the U.S.EPA (Silverstein, 2005), certification organizations (NSF International, 2015) and manufacturers (BRITA, 2019, PUR, 2019) caution that filters are not to be used: on water that is microbiologically unsafe or inadequately disinfected; or by people most vulnerable to microbial infections.

**In light of this uncertainty, our position is that it is irresponsible to NOT share microbial results such as those in the poster.** We concluded in the poster that additional studies about ACB PoU filters are critically needed to ensure their overall (not just lead removal) performance is adequate, especially in aging and oversized systems such as in Flint. We believe that the best, most impactful solutions to these challenges will come when scientists, water utilities, the medical community and public health officials come together, work constructively, share experiences and coordinate efforts. We owe this to the residents of Flint and communities like theirs.

#### Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare. However, we wish to add the following disclosure. After being served with subpoenas by the Office of Special Counsel appointed by the Attorney General of the State of Michigan, Zervos and McElmurry testified, under oath and without compensation, in court proceedings related to felony cases brought against two former employees of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. Zervos grants include Pfizer, Merck, Medimmune, and consultant for Contrafect, none of the listed grants supported the work reported here.

#### Funding source

Henry Ford Hospital internal support .

**From:** Iratxe Puebla <[cope\\_assistant@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_assistant@publicationethics.org)>  
**Sent:** Sunday, December 15, 2019 7:31 AM  
**To:** [eskild.petersen@gmail.com](mailto:eskild.petersen@gmail.com)  
**Cc:** Fennell, Catriona (ELS-AMS) <[c.fennell@elsevier.com](mailto:c.fennell@elsevier.com)>; Marc Edwards <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)>  
**Subject:** Concerns raised to the attention of COPE

Dear Dr Petersen,

I am writing to you as the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) has received a concern from Marc Edwards in relation to the abstract below in *International Journal of Infectious Diseases*:

February 2019 Volume 79, Supplement 1, Pages 30–31

Bacterial colonization of drinking water: implications for an aging U.S. water infrastructure  
G. Maki, S. McElmurry, P. Kilgore, N. Love, H. Misikir, M. Perri, M. Zervos

As you may know, COPE's role is primarily to provide advice for member editors and journals and to promote a better understanding of publication ethics. If concerns are raised to COPE's attention, we aim to provide guidance on whether any actions taken are not aligned with the COPE Core Practices or COPE guidelines, and provide advice in resolving disagreements between the reader/author and the editor. We do not seek to interfere with specific editorial decisions.

With this in mind, we are writing to you regarding Dr Edwards's concerns in the hope that we can facilitate a dialogue in relation to the concerns raised. In order for the process to be as transparent and constructive as possible, we have copied Dr Edwards on this email and request that you do the same in your reply.

Dr Edwards has raised concerns about the study, as he feels that the conclusions attributing 50% mortality to use of an off-the-shelf water filter in Flint are not supported. Dr Edwards has also raised concerns about whether the study received appropriate oversight and approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), given that the study questions the safety of a water treatment device that is recommended by health authorities, it included a limited amount of controls, and reports death of five patients, making an association between this outcome and the use of the device. The comments we received from Dr Edwards are copied below as reference.

Dr Edwards notes that he raised his concerns to your attention and that you offered him to submit a letter to the editor, but he is not satisfied by the journal's response.

We would very much appreciate hearing your comments in relation to Dr Edwards's concerns. Could you please provide us with information on the process the journal followed to handle the concerns raised by Dr Edwards?

We would be grateful if you could also please share information on your existing policies regarding ethical requirements for publications in the journal.

Many thanks for helping us address Dr Edwards's concerns. We look forward to hearing from you.

With best wishes,

Iratxe Puebla  
Facilitation and Integrity Officer  
Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)

[www.publicationethics.org](http://www.publicationethics.org)

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On behalf of

COPE Facilitation and Integrity subcommittee

### **Concerns raised by Marc Edwards**

If an allegation is made of a study, regarding a possibly fabricated conclusion, for a research study in which 5 of 10 patients died, does:

- 1) the editor need to enforce production of an IRB protocol and approval
- 2) the editor need to enforce, resolution of the concern, about a potentially fabricated conclusion.

What aspects of the Core Practices do you believe that the member is contravening, and why

The relevant core practices are:

- 1) Allegations of misconduct. Specifically, suspicions of a possibly fabricated conclusion, attributing 50% mortality to use of an off-the-shelf water filter in Flint.
- 2) Ethical oversight. We would like assurance that the protocol for a research study, that resulted in the death of 5 of 10 patients, received appropriate IRB approval.

**From:** Iratxe Puebla <[cope\\_assistant@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_assistant@publicationethics.org)>  
**Sent:** Monday, November 18, 2019 2:49 AM  
**To:** Marc Edwards <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)>  
**Subject:** Re: Concerns raised to the attention of COPE

Dear Dr Edwards,

Thank you, I have also raised this information to the attention of the member of the COPE Facilitation and Integrity subcommittee.

With best wishes,

Iratxe

Iratxe Puebla  
Facilitation and Integrity Officer  
Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)  
[www.publicationethics.org](http://www.publicationethics.org)

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Registered office: COPE, New Kings Court, Tollgate, Chandler's Ford, Eastleigh, Hampshire, SO53 3LG, UK

On Sun, Nov 17, 2019 at 5:00 PM <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)> wrote:

While it does not have bearing on the case, within 24 hours of our first posing questions to the HFHS IRB, they told Dr. Zervos of our complaint, and he filed retaliatory counter charges, claiming 3 of our peer reviewed papers did not have IRB. He has threatened us with slander and libel on numerous occasions. He also sent letters alleging misconduct to our funding agency.

We did submit an IRB before our work was done, and our work was judged to be exempt, since it does not involve human subjects. The information about Ms. Walters blood lead records that he speaks of, was derived from national news. Our IRB investigated his allegations, and found there was no merit, and that before our work was done our IRB found it was human subjects exempt. Our IRB also protected his identity, and had he not sent his email with his allegations against us to so many parties, we would not even know about it.

There is also a group of MD's, local to Flint and otherwise, who are raising questions about the ethics of this study. I am informed they have submitted a letter to the editor of IJID about this paper.

I am refraining from blogging about this until you inform us the case is dropped or resolved.

Marc

**From:** Iratxe Puebla <[cope\\_assistant@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_assistant@publicationethics.org)>  
**Sent:** Sunday, November 17, 2019 5:37 AM  
**To:** Marc Edwards <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)>  
**Subject:** Re: Concerns raised to the attention of COPE

Dear Dr Edwards,

Many thanks for your response and for this further information, I have raised it to the attention of the member of the COPE Facilitation and Integrity subcommittee who is reviewing the case and I will be in touch in due course.

With best wishes,

Iratxe

Iratxe Puebla  
Facilitation and Integrity Officer  
Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)  
[www.publicationethics.org](http://www.publicationethics.org)

Registered charity No 1123023  
Registered in England and Wales, Company No 6389120  
Registered office: COPE, New Kings Court, Tollgate, Chandler's Ford, Eastleigh, Hampshire, SO53 3LG, UK

On Tue, Nov 12, 2019 at 4:18 PM <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)> wrote:

Dear Iratxe,

Thank you for your follow up questions. Our response is below. The underlined text provides hyperlinks to news stories and blogs documenting our concerns.

**Question: You have indicated that you have concerns about ethical oversight for the study. We note that as part of the correspondence you supplied, a representative of the Henry Ford Health System referred to a review by an IRB that adhered to federal research guidelines and relevant institutional policies; in other words, the IRB seemed to say that sufficient ethical oversight has been provided. Could you provide further information on your concerns about the ethical oversight for the work? On what basis do you question what has been done in this regard by the IRB? Are there other relevant facts that COPE can/should consider here?**

Response: We are doubtful that any IRB, would approve a prospective human subjects research study design that:

1. questions the safety of a water treatment device (i.e., point of use lead filters) that is voluntarily used by tens of millions of American's, and which is currently being recommended for use in Flint by State and Federal health authorities, with just 1 control sample in Detroit water

2. questions the safety of this water treatment device that is currently recommended by health authorities, without appropriate controls to detect contamination, or which requires unambiguous identification of alleged pathogens
3. results in the death of 5/10 patients, allegedly as a result of using the device during the study
4. publishes a generalizable conclusion that effectively undermines public use of the water safety device (i.e., potentially causing harm), without demanding statistically defensible results

We can guarantee that the IRB's of our institutions would never approve or allow such a study. We would therefore very much like to see written proof, that the authors human health study design as executed in the IJID article, was in fact reviewed and approved by an actual IRB before publication.

**Question: You indicated that you feel the abstract's conclusion may be fabricated, could you please elaborate on the reasons for this concern? Specifically, what is the evidence in support for your contention that some of this work has been fabricated?**

Response: We are concerned that this abstract presents a fabricated timeline, results and conclusion, that is designed to fulfill the authors' 2016 prophesy, that unless they were immediately given \$11 million dollars in research funding by the State of Michigan that "people are going to fucking die." The authors "people are going to die" mantra was first unveiled in a felony pre-trial against Chief Medical Officer Dr. Eden Wells starting in 2017. Many of the abstract authors appeared as fact witnesses in Dr. Wells criminal pre-trial. Their mantra was then repeated in a new Frontline PBS documentary featuring the authors "people could die" allegations taken completely out of context.

The original basis of the author's "people could die" 2016 prophesy, was that Flint residents would die of Legionnaire's disease outbreak in summer 2016—but that predicted outbreak and associated deaths did not occur. The IJID abstract now suggests, that because the State of Michigan provided free point of use (POU) filters to remove lead from Flint water as a humanitarian gesture in starting in fall 2015, that Flint residents died as a result. Please note that these authors have been the source of repeated rumors in Flint that the POU filters were causing Shigella, Legionella and a host of diseases.

The authors ulterior motives regarding use of the IJID article, as a cudgel in their ongoing battle with the State of MI and the USEPA (who dared to criticize their shoddy science and lack of control samples in prior research), is obvious based on their own words. In the Frontline article touting the IJID results, more background is provided and Dr. Zervos is quoted:

***"The state ultimately rejected the team's work, saying the scientists had "only added to the public confusion," and that an outside consulting firm the state hired had been critical of their work. Zervos continued working on water issues in Flint. In 2018, a team including Zervos tested water filters from 10 Flint residents' homes that they suspected were infected. The results, published early this year in the International Journal of Infectious Diseases, announced that they had found toxic, often antibiotic-resistant bacteria in some filters. "By us saying that the filters potentially have a problem with them, we were also getting push back [from the state]," Zervos told FRONTLINE. "There are people going around that are saying that it's normal to have bacteria in the water and that the filters are the solution to this. There are still a lot of questions."***

The authors previously attempted to publish a peer reviewed paper, that alleged dangers from point-of-use (POU) filters in Flint, that was rejected by 4 reviewers in the *Journal Environmental Science and Technology Letters* in early 2017. Dr. Masten was a co-author on that paper (and co-PI on the authors grant) and immediately raised serious ethical concerns about that work—her concerns extend to this IJID abstract as well.

The “Results” of the IJID abstract clearly indicate that the research study shows, that Flint residents are dying as a result of using the POU filters as follows:

**Results:** Results of Flint samples are shown in Table 1. **No pathogens were detected from Detroit water. Residents of 7/10 homes in Flint had severe pneumonia, 1 sepsis, and 1 folliculitis. 5/10 patients died.**

Since the POU filters were not distributed by the State of Michigan until fall 2015, we do not understand how they could have possibly caused the cited Legionnaire’s disease outbreak that officially ended in August 2015. We further doubt that 5/10 patients died as a result of using the filters. First, there is no scientifically defensible pathway by which POU filters could cause such a high incidence of pneumonia. Second, we consider it possible, that Dr. Zervos first identified patients with pneumonia, and then went and took samples from their filters *after the fact*. We even consider it possible that some of the patients died before he even collected their water samples, and that some of these patients did not even have POU water filters when the initial infections occurred. To date, the authors and Henry Ford IRB, have refused to answer our very basic questions.

We look forward to hearing from you.

With best wishes,

Iratxe

Iratxe Puebla  
Facilitation and Integrity Officer  
Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)  
[www.publicationethics.org](http://www.publicationethics.org)

Registered charity No 1123023  
Registered in England and Wales, Company No 6389120  
Registered office: COPE, New Kings Court, Tollgate, Chandler's Ford, Eastleigh, Hampshire, SO53 3LG, UK

On behalf of

COPE Facilitation and Integrity subcommittee

**From:** Iratxe Puebla <[cope\\_assistant@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_assistant@publicationethics.org)>  
**Sent:** Sunday, November 3, 2019 5:46 AM  
**To:** [edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)  
**Subject:** Concerns raised to the attention of COPE

Dear Dr Edwards,

I am writing in relation to the concerns you raised to the attention of COPE regarding the abstract in *International Journal of Infectious Disease* titled 'Bacterial colonization of drinking water: implications for an aging U.S. water infrastructure.'

I have raised this case to the attention of a member of the COPE Facilitation and Integrity subcommittee for review and I will be in touch in due course.

With best wishes,

Iratxe

Iratxe Puebla  
Facilitation and Integrity Officer  
Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)  
[www.publicationethics.org](http://www.publicationethics.org)

Registered charity No 1123023  
Registered in England and Wales, Company No 6389120  
Registered office: COPE, New Kings Court, Tollgate, Chandler's Ford, Eastleigh, Hampshire, SO53 3LG, UK

**From:** Eskild Petersen <eskild.petersen@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, October 24, 2019 11:14 AM  
**To:** Marc Edwards <edwardsm@vt.edu>  
**Cc:** Spencer, David (ELS-OXF) <d.spencer.1@elsevier.com>  
**Subject:** Re: Questions regarding publication entitled Bacterial colonization of drinking water: implications for an aging U.S. water infrastructure

Dear Marc Edwards

Thank you very much for your mail.

As I mailed you earlier, the authors of the abstract in the IJID you refer to promised to be in contact with you. If that does not happen I have no possibility to enforce that. The COPE guidelines do not empower an editor to obtain the information you ask for from an author.

The IJID peer reviewed the abstract based on its apparent scientific merit and found the study of interest to a larger audience. Note that conference abstracts are most often not fully completed studies.

As I suggested earlier, the IJID can offer to publish a "letter to the editor" where your concerns are expressed. Then it is up to the authors of the abstract to answer or not, but in any case your concern will be available for everyone to be seen.

Yours sincerely,

Eskild Petersen, MD  
Editor-in-Chief  
IJID

On Tue, Oct 22, 2019 at 9:16 PM <edwardsm@vt.edu> wrote:

Dear Margot,

It has now been more than 1 month since we first asked questions about the ethical design of the IJID article (see attached).

It has also been 18 days since we submitted a list of questions about this study to the authors, under COPE guidelines, which IJID ascribes to.

May we please have a timeline, in which responses from the authors to our scientific and ethics questions, can be expected?

We do not understand why IRB approval and protocols for a human subjects experiment, which reported an astonishing result that 5/10 study patients died, has not yet been produced in response to our request. The only response we have received, was your 1 sentence assurance, that this study did receive HFHS IRB approval.

Best Regards,

Marc Edwards

**From:** [edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu) <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)>

**Sent:** Friday, October 4, 2019 11:43 AM

**To:** 'LaPointe, Margot' <[MLaPoin1@hfhs.org](mailto:MLaPoin1@hfhs.org)>; 'Susan Masten' <[masten@egr.msu.edu](mailto:masten@egr.msu.edu)>; 'Eskild Petersen' <[eskild.petersen@gmail.com](mailto:eskild.petersen@gmail.com)>

**Cc:** 'Clinical Trials Office "CTO" Research' <[CTOResearch@hfhs.org](mailto:CTOResearch@hfhs.org)>; 'HFAH Clinical Trials' <[HFAHClinicalTrials@hfhs.org](mailto:HFAHClinicalTrials@hfhs.org)>; 'Judy Birk' <[jbirk@umich.edu](mailto:jbirk@umich.edu)>; '[monica.malian@wayne.edu](mailto:monica.malian@wayne.edu)' <[monica.malian@wayne.edu](mailto:monica.malian@wayne.edu)>; '[OswaldE1@michigan.gov](mailto:OswaldE1@michigan.gov)' <[OswaldE1@michigan.gov](mailto:OswaldE1@michigan.gov)>; '[khalidunj@michigan.gov](mailto:khalidunj@michigan.gov)' <[khalidunj@michigan.gov](mailto:khalidunj@michigan.gov)>; 'Amy Pruden' <[apruden@vt.edu](mailto:apruden@vt.edu)>; 'Siddhartha Roy' <[sidroy@vt.edu](mailto:sidroy@vt.edu)>

**Subject:** RE: Questions regarding publication entitled Bacterial colonization of drinking water: implications for an aging U.S. water infrastructure

Hi Margot,

We have communicated with IJID editors and have agreed on the following manner of proceeding.

We herein, are formally submitting questions for the authors of the published IJID abstract, in the attached WORD document.

We do not know how to reach the corresponding author, and we trust you will provide these questions to them.

We hope the authors will provide us with answers to our questions about their study design, methods, data and conclusions.

If the authors and Henry Ford will not answer our questions, the editors will work under COPE guidelines, to seek answers to the questions we have posed.

I have cc'd the editor of the IJID journal, Eskild Petersen, to keep them in the loop.

Best Regards,

Marc

**From:** LaPointe, Margot <[MLaPoin1@hfhs.org](mailto:MLaPoin1@hfhs.org)>

**Sent:** Monday, September 30, 2019 8:04 PM

**To:** [edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu); 'Cynthia Shindledecker' <[cshindle@umich.edu](mailto:cshindle@umich.edu)>; 'Susan Masten' <[masten@egr.msu.edu](mailto:masten@egr.msu.edu)>

**Cc:** Clinical Trials Office "CTO" Research <[CTOResearch@hfhs.org](mailto:CTOResearch@hfhs.org)>; HFAH Clinical Trials <[HFAHClinicalTrials@hfhs.org](mailto:HFAHClinicalTrials@hfhs.org)>; 'Judy Birk' <[jbirk@umich.edu](mailto:jbirk@umich.edu)>; '[monica.malian@wayne.edu](mailto:monica.malian@wayne.edu)'; '[OswaldE1@michigan.gov](mailto:OswaldE1@michigan.gov)'; '[khalidunj@michigan.gov](mailto:khalidunj@michigan.gov)'; 'Amy Pruden' <[apruden@vt.edu](mailto:apruden@vt.edu)>; 'Siddhartha Roy' <[sidroy@vt.edu](mailto:sidroy@vt.edu)>

**Subject:** RE: Questions regarding publication entitled Bacterial colonization of drinking water: implications for an aging U.S. water infrastructure

Like all research conducted at Henry Ford Health System, this study by Dr. Marcus Zervos was thoroughly reviewed and approved by our Institutional Review Board. The IRB determined the study was appropriately designed and was in compliance with all required federal research guidelines as well as with all Henry Ford research policies and procedures.

**From:** [edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu) <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)>

**Sent:** Friday, September 27, 2019 2:16 PM

**To:** 'Cynthia Shindledecker' <[cshindle@umich.edu](mailto:cshindle@umich.edu)>; 'Susan Masten' <[masten@egr.msu.edu](mailto:masten@egr.msu.edu)>

**Cc:** LaPointe, Margot <[MLaPoin1@hfhs.org](mailto:MLaPoin1@hfhs.org)>; Clinical Trials Office "CTO" Research <[CTOResearch@hfhs.org](mailto:CTOResearch@hfhs.org)>; HFAH Clinical Trials <[HFAHClinicalTrials@hfhs.org](mailto:HFAHClinicalTrials@hfhs.org)>; 'Judy Birk' <[jbirk@umich.edu](mailto:jbirk@umich.edu)>; [monica.malian@wayne.edu](mailto:monica.malian@wayne.edu); [OswaldE1@michigan.gov](mailto:OswaldE1@michigan.gov); [khaldunj@michigan.gov](mailto:khaldunj@michigan.gov); 'Amy Pruden' <[apruden@vt.edu](mailto:apruden@vt.edu)>; 'Siddhartha Roy' <[sidroy@vt.edu](mailto:sidroy@vt.edu)>

**Subject:** RE: Questions regarding publication entitled Bacterial colonization of drinking water: implications for an aging U.S. water infrastructure

**\*\*\* External E-Mail – Use Caution \*\*\***

Dear IRB of Henry Ford, UM and Wayne State,

It has been 10 days since we first raised serious ethical issues associated with this IJID publication associated with authors from your institutions, and the associated FRONTLINE article.

If you will not provide us with reasonable answers to the questions posed, and documentation of IRB approving this study, which appears to be using HFHS patients POU filter samples and health data, as a basis for a generalized conclusion made in a research journal, we will be forced to make a complaint to the AMA via the appropriate MI state licensing boards and file a COPE query with the Journal.

If there is an innocent explanation (i.e., someone can publicly defend the study design and associated research ethics of this journal article), can someone please provide that to us at this time?

Thank you.

Marc

**From:** [edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu) <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)>

**Sent:** Thursday, September 19, 2019 10:13 PM

**To:** 'Cynthia Shindledecker' <[cshindle@umich.edu](mailto:cshindle@umich.edu)>; 'Susan Masten' <[masten@egr.msu.edu](mailto:masten@egr.msu.edu)>

**Cc:** [mlapoin1@hfhs.org](mailto:mlapoin1@hfhs.org) <[mlapoin1@hfhs.org](mailto:mlapoin1@hfhs.org)>; [CTOResearch@hfhs.org](mailto:CTOResearch@hfhs.org) <[CTOResearch@hfhs.org](mailto:CTOResearch@hfhs.org)>; [HFAHClinicalTrials@hfhs.org](mailto:HFAHClinicalTrials@hfhs.org) <[HFAHClinicalTrials@hfhs.org](mailto:HFAHClinicalTrials@hfhs.org)>; 'Judy Birk' <[jbirk@umich.edu](mailto:jbirk@umich.edu)>; [monica.malian@wayne.edu](mailto:monica.malian@wayne.edu) <[monica.malian@wayne.edu](mailto:monica.malian@wayne.edu)>; [OswaldE1@michigan.gov](mailto:OswaldE1@michigan.gov) <[OswaldE1@michigan.gov](mailto:OswaldE1@michigan.gov)>; [khaldunj@michigan.gov](mailto:khaldunj@michigan.gov) <[khaldunj@michigan.gov](mailto:khaldunj@michigan.gov)>; 'Amy Pruden' <[apruden@vt.edu](mailto:apruden@vt.edu)>; 'Siddhartha Roy' <[sidroy@vt.edu](mailto:sidroy@vt.edu)>

**Subject:** RE: Questions regarding publication entitled Bacterial colonization of drinking water: implications for an aging U.S. water infrastructure

Dear IRB of Henry Ford, UM and Wayne State.

Frontline has just written us, and on second thought, they now assert they did not collect the samples used in the cited publication.

Assuming that is true, we still have serious concerns about the ethics of this study design, and the ethics of how it is being reported.

There is only one control sample in Detroit with POU filters, there are alarmist study **RESULTS (100% infection rate amongst people using Flint POU filters, 5/10 deaths.)**, and there is a generalized conclusion that immunocompromised individuals in Flint and around the world should avoid POU filters. At a time when POU filter use is still being recommended in Flint by all responsible health authorities.

It is also perfectly obvious that the vast majority of deaths from Legionella and possibly pneumonia, occurred before September 2015, but the POU filters were not widely distributed in Flint until after that time. How on earth could the POU filters have caused the cited deaths and infections? The logic and timing presented in the paper, make no sense whatsoever.

We want to understand, how such a human health research study design, could be IRB approved.

Can we at least get a simple answer, as to whether this HFHS, UM and Wayne State study involving a reported 100% infection rate and 50% mortality and an alarmist generalized conclusion, was IRB approved or not?

Marc

**From:** Cynthia Shindledecker <[cshindle@umich.edu](mailto:cshindle@umich.edu)>

**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2019 11:26 AM

**To:** Susan Masten <[masten@egr.msu.edu](mailto:masten@egr.msu.edu)>

**Cc:** [mlapoin1@hfhs.org](mailto:mlapoin1@hfhs.org); [CTOResearch@hfhs.org](mailto:CTOResearch@hfhs.org); [HFAHClinicalTrials@hfhs.org](mailto:HFAHClinicalTrials@hfhs.org); Judy Birk <[jbirk@umich.edu](mailto:jbirk@umich.edu)>; [monica.malian@wayne.edu](mailto:monica.malian@wayne.edu); [OswaldE1@michigan.gov](mailto:OswaldE1@michigan.gov); [khaldunj@michigan.gov](mailto:khaldunj@michigan.gov); Amy Pruden <[apruden@vt.edu](mailto:apruden@vt.edu)>; Marc Edwards <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)>; Siddhartha Roy <[sidroy@vt.edu](mailto:sidroy@vt.edu)>

**Subject:** Re: Questions regarding publication entitled Bacterial colonization of drinking water: implications for an aging U.S. water infrastructure

Dear Dr. Masten,

Our usual process for requests such as this is to go through our FOIA office. Please refer to this website for more information: <https://foia.vpcomm.umich.edu/>.

Sincerely,

Cindy Shindledecker

--

Cindy Shindledecker, CIP

Director

Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (IRB-HSBS)

University of Michigan

North Campus Research Complex

1600 Huron Parkway, Building 520, Room 1170

Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2800

734-615-9466

Website: <http://research-compliance.umich.edu/irb-health-sciences-and-behavioral-sciences-hsbs>

On Tue, Sep 17, 2019 at 10:10 PM Susan Masten <[masten@egr.msu.edu](mailto:masten@egr.msu.edu)> wrote:

Dear Drs. LaPointe, Birk, Malian, and Shindledecker:

We are writing to request a copy of IRB protocols and approvals, for a research study conducted by Drs. Maki, Zervos, Misikir, and Perri of the Henry Ford System, Dr. McElmurry of Wayne State, and Dr. Love of University of Michigan on bacterial colonization of drinking water. These research results were published in ***the International Journal of Infectious Diseases***, Feb 2019, Vol 79, Supplement 1, pages 30-31 at the following location:

[https://www.ijidonline.com/article/S1201-9712\(18\)34667-8/fulltext](https://www.ijidonline.com/article/S1201-9712(18)34667-8/fulltext)

Details of our request and cause for concern are provided in the attached letter.

We thank you for your time and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Marc Edwards, Ph.D.  
Siddhartha Roy, Ph.D.  
Susan Masten, Ph.D.  
Amy Pruden, Ph.D.

--

Susan J. Masten, Ph.D., P.E.  
Professor  
Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies Department of Civil and  
Environmental Engineering Engineering Building  
428 S. Shaw Ln., Room 3546  
East Lansing, MI 48824

Phone: 517 355-2254  
Fax: 517 355-0250

**From:** Eskild Petersen <[eskind.petersen@gmail.com](mailto:eskind.petersen@gmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, October 3, 2019 10:52 AM  
**To:** [edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)  
**Cc:** IJID (ELS) <[IJID@elsevier.com](mailto:IJID@elsevier.com)>; Britta Lassmann <[britta.lassmann@isid.org](mailto:britta.lassmann@isid.org)>  
**Subject:** Re: FW: Submission date, acceptance date?

Dear Marc

You want it published in the IJID - right?

In that case you write a letter to the editors and we communicate with the authors. You can also just mail the authors and ask your questions and if you after that want to have a letter in the IJID we will consider that too.

It is up to you.

Best wishes

Eskild Petersen, MD  
Editor-in-Chief  
IJID

On Thu, Oct 3, 2019 at 6:47 PM <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)> wrote:

We would prefer to ask questions, get simple answers from the authors, and at that point we can choose to write a letter (or not).

They can then choose to reply if we do write a letter.

There might be legitimate answers to our questions. The problem is, that there is not enough information provided in the article, to understand what on earth they did, and how on earth they can make such a conclusion.

For example, we cannot write a rational letter, without knowing when the people were infected, when they died, seeing the IRB approvals, etc..

Is that an acceptable path forward?

Marc

**From:** Eskild Petersen <[eskind.petersen@gmail.com](mailto:eskind.petersen@gmail.com)>

**Sent:** Thursday, October 3, 2019 10:27 AM

**To:** IJID (ELS) <[IJID@elsevier.com](mailto:IJID@elsevier.com)>; [edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu); Britta Lassmann ([britta.lassmann@isid.org](mailto:britta.lassmann@isid.org)) <[britta.lassmann@isid.org](mailto:britta.lassmann@isid.org)>

**Subject:** Re: FW: Submission date, acceptance date?

Dear Mark Edwards

This is not a paper. It is an abstract presented as a poster at International Meeting on Emerging Diseases and Surveillance (IMED), Vienna, 2018.

As such the abstract was reviewed and accepted by the IMED scientific committee. All accepted abstracts are published in the IJID as a supplement without further review.

You are most welcome to send a letter to the editor with questions to the authors. We will then ask the authors to reply and publish your letter and the reply in the same issue.

Best wishes

Eskild Petersen, MD

Editor-in-Chief

IJID

On Thu, Oct 3, 2019 at 4:33 PM IJID (ELS) <[IJID@elsevier.com](mailto:IJID@elsevier.com)> wrote:

Dear Eskild,

Please see e-mail below.

Kind regards,

**Isabela Caus**

Publishing Administrative Editor

Editorial Office

**ELSEVIER** | Global Publishing Development

**From:** [edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu) <[edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)>

**Sent:** 03 October 2019 13:07

**To:** IJID (ELS) <[IJID@elsevier.com](mailto:IJID@elsevier.com)>

**Subject:** RE: Submission date, acceptance date?

Dear Isabela,

There is a group of us who have concerns about the ethics of this paper's study design and conclusions, and we will be submitting a list of questions to the authors.

Before we submit, we would like to know if this was ever reviewed at all. Is this paper considered "peer reviewed" by Elsevier?

Marc

**From:** IJID (ELS) <[IJID@elsevier.com](mailto:IJID@elsevier.com)>

**Sent:** Tuesday, March 19, 2019 5:22 AM

**To:** [edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu)

**Subject:** RE: Submission date, acceptance date?

Dear Marc Edwards,

Thank you for your inquiry.

Please be informed that the article “Bacterial colonization of drinking water: implications for an aging U.S. water infrastructure” is part of the special issue “International Meeting on Emerging Diseases and Surveillance (IMED) 2018”. Therefore, I am unable to provide with the peer-review timelines for this paper.

Kind regards,

**Isabela Caus**

Publishing Administrative Editor

Editorial Office

**ELSEVIER** | Global Publishing Development

**From:** [edwardsm@vt.edu](mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu) [<mailto:edwardsm@vt.edu>]

**Sent:** 18 March 2019 14:59

**To:** IJID (ELS) <[IJID@elsevier.com](mailto:IJID@elsevier.com)>

**Subject:** Submission date, acceptance date?

Can you tell me when this article was submitted and when it was accepted?

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1201971218346678?via%3Dihub>