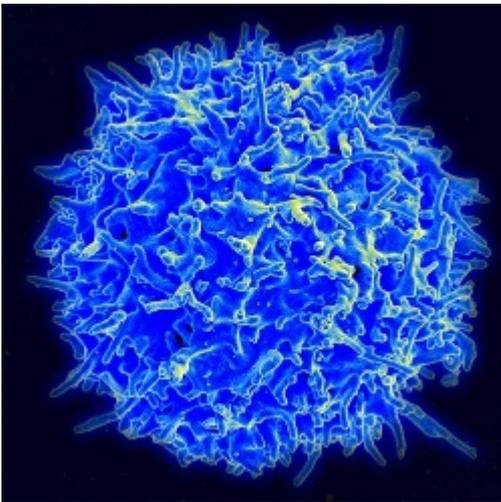


COVID vs. Cable News: Coronavirus Misinformation Is Rampant



By Alex Berezow, PhD — October 13, 2020

In 2020, empirically determined knowledge is only considered true if it first passes a litmus test -- not the geeky pH variety but the obnoxious political one. The results are as absurd and dangerous as you'd imagine, particularly when it involves COVID and cable news.



T cells are non-partisan. (Source: Public Domain / Wikipedia) [1]

I collect science textbooks. Some of the best ones I have on my shelf are *Janeway's Immunobiology*, *Lehninger Principles of Biochemistry*, *Casarett & Doull's Toxicology*, and *Sherris Medical Microbiology*. They all have two things in common: (1) As is customary, each book is named after a retired (or, more likely, dead) original author, and (2) A proper understanding of the contents of each book does not depend on your political affiliation.

But apparently, that's not how science operates anymore in 2020. Throughout the world, and in this country in particular, empirically determined knowledge is only considered true if it first passes a litmus test -- not the geeky pH variety but the obnoxious political one. In other words, things like biochemistry are now filtered through a political lens, and the results are as preposterous and dangerous as you probably imagine.

Consider the "debate" over the drug hydroxychloroquine (HCQ), which a recent trial has [shown definitively not to work against the coronavirus](#) [2]. This is either an objective fact that can be

experimentally verified in the laboratory or a left-wing plot. You decide. Some commenters already have.

“ Exactly. ACSH is beginning to read like an academic paper from a major institution of learning, more interested in the leftist political zeitgeist than in actual science.”

How have we gotten to this point? It's difficult to lay the blame anywhere other than partisan news outlets and social media. For instance, according to the [New York Times](#) [3], Fox News host Laura Ingraham in April declared HCQ a "game changer" that could bring back patients stricken with COVID-19 "like Lazarus, up from the grave." Anyone who disagreed was "in total denial."

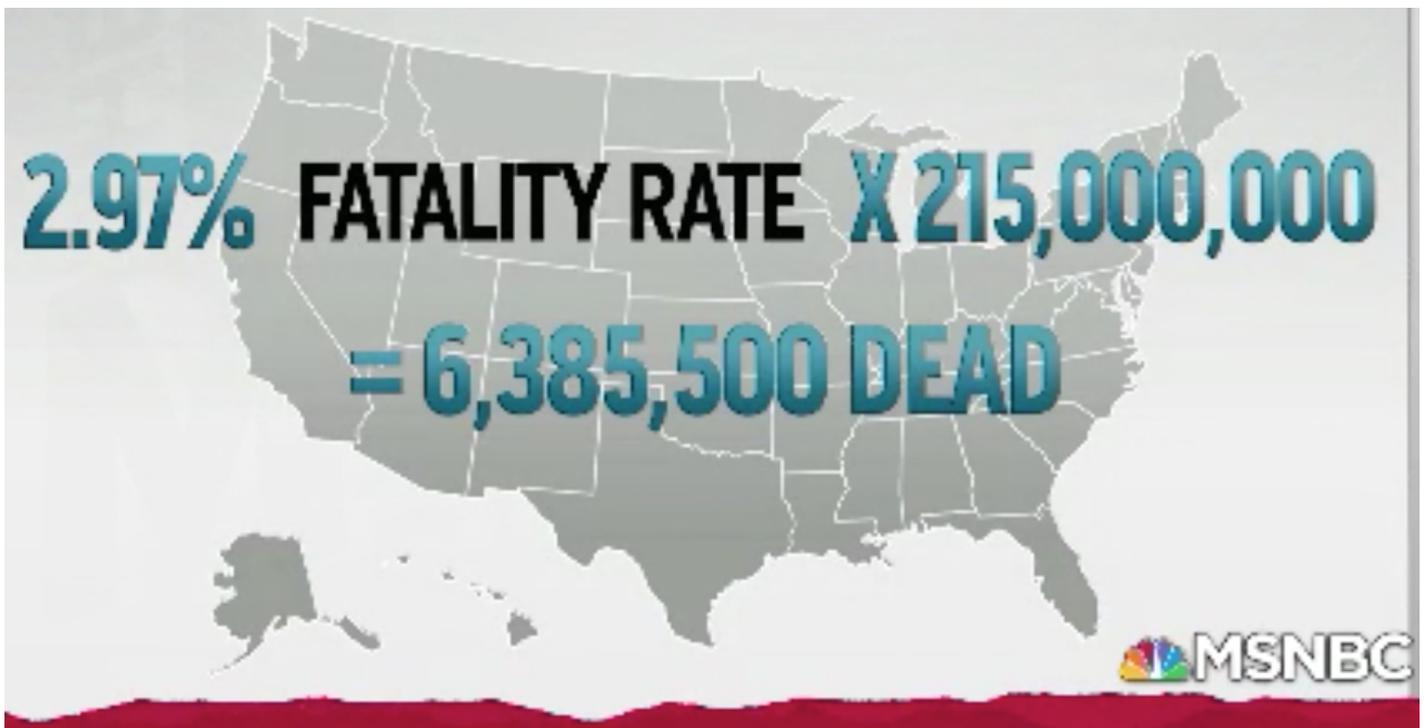
Hyperbole aside, at the time, HCQ was being investigated as a potential treatment. While Ingraham's initial enthusiasm could be somewhat justifiable based on anecdotal reports, it no longer is. Yet, Ingraham [continues to promote any research that is pro-HCQ](#) [4], despite the fact that the best available evidence (which comes from a recent randomized clinical trial) shows that the drug doesn't work.

ACSH was well ahead of the game. In March, Dr. Josh Bloom, who spent years at the bench as an antiviral drug researcher, was [skeptical that HCQ would be potent enough](#) [5] to fight off the coronavirus. His scientific instinct -- based on a deep and practical understanding of toxicology and biochemistry -- was correct, and the best data that has been generated thus far confirms his suspicion.

Lest you are under the impression that pseudoscientific rants come from only one side of the political spectrum, rest assured that the crazy comes from every direction. MSNBC's Rachel Maddow [claims](#) [6] that President Trump's "herd immunity" plan would result in the deaths of 6.4 million Americans. How does she get there? Well, by doing what she always does: Using fancy graphics and clever sounding logic that's based on faulty assumptions, half-truths, and sleight-of-hand.

Maddow assumes that about 2/3 of Americans would need to be immune to SARS-CoV-2 to create herd immunity. (Note: "Herd immunity" ***does not*** mean that there are no more infections; it means no more epidemics or outbreaks.) That's a reasonable estimate, and she calculates that 215 million Americans would need to be immune.

Now, the sleight-of-hand. She claims that a case-fatality rate of 2.97% would mean that, of those 215 million infected Americans, about 6.4 million would die.



There are three big problems with that. First, the case-fatality rate (which examines fatalities among confirmed cases), is far higher than the infection-fatality rate (which examines fatalities among all cases, both confirmed and unconfirmed). The current CFR is around 2.7%, but the [IFR is likely closer to 0.64%](#) [7]. Second, the fatality rate is falling as we've learned how to better treat COVID-19 with drugs like remdesivir and dexamethasone. And third (setting aside the argument over whether herd immunity is a viable strategy), it's dishonest to assume that the plan involves infecting 215 million random Americans. That is not true. The plan, [to the extent that there is one](#) [8], involves protecting the elderly and infirm while allowing younger, healthier people to contract COVID-19. The infection-fatality rate will be far lower for these people.

Finally, because this is particularly stupid, [Buzzfeed](#) [9] says that T cells are part of a right-wing conspiracy.

The Right Wing Has A New Theory For Why The Pandemic Will End Soon: T Cells

Right-wing commentators and Trump's new science adviser, Scott Atlas, say new studies signal good news for ending the pandemic. Scientists say that's a dangerous leap.



Stephanie M. Lee

BuzzFeed News Reporter

Posted on August 14, 2020, at 5:04 p.m. ET

[9]

(Surprisingly, the article explained the science fairly well if you're able to get past the ludicrous headline.)

Partisanship Will Destroy American Science

As we have [written previously](#) [10], political partisanship is an existential threat to American science and technology. It's frankly pathetic that any science news presented by the media must first pass through a red or blue filter.

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Source URL: <https://www.acsh.org/news/2020/10/13/covid-vs-cable-news-coronavirus-misinformation-rampant-15089>

Links

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T_cell#/media/File:Healthy_Human_T_Cell.jpg

[2] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2020/10/09/covid-trial-proves-hydroxychloroquine-does-not-help-treat-coronavirus-15077>

[3] <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/22/business/media/virus-fox-news-hydroxychloroquine.html>

[4] <https://twitter.com/IngrahamAngle/status/1307055467550703617?s=20>

[5] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2020/03/25/will-hydroxychloroquine-chloroquines-safer-cousin-make-coronavirus-cut-14663>

[6] <https://www.msnbc.com/rachel-maddow/watch/math-on-trump-covid-strategy-has-millions-dying-before-it-works-91958341539>

[7] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2020/06/23/coronavirus-covid-deaths-us-age-race-14863>

[8] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2020/10/07/great-barrington-declaration-solution-endless-covid-lockdowns-15074>

[9] <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/stephaniemlee/coronavirus-t-cells-immunity-scott-atlas>

[10] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2020/10/01/slow-suicide-american-science-15065>