

Progressive Medicos and Scientists Forum

National Convener: Dr Harjit Bhatti; Contact: 8586848479

Press release regarding ICMR's debunking of a modelling study on COVID 19 apparently supported by it, as 'Misleading'.

Date: 16 June 2020

Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has issued a statement that news reports related to a study by a group of doctors “attributing this study to ICMR” are misleading. The study has been published on www.medrxiv.org, a preprint server for studies on health sciences. Based on the findings of their study “A Model Based Analysis for COVID-19 Pandemic in India: Implications for Health Systems and Policy for Low- and Middle-Income Countries”, the authors conclude:

Lockdown measures delay the onset of peak and give much needed time to health system to prepare. Strengthening the public health system response in terms of testing, isolation treatment of cases, and contact tracing needs would lead to significant gains in terms of case load, and meeting health system needs.

ICMR's embarrassment is understandable in the sense that none of the conclusions of the study 'ostensibly' sponsored by it are anywhere in sight. Instead of delay of the peak by flattening of the epidemic curve, the slope of the curve is only getting steeper by the day and the delay is only in terms of nobody knowing how high the peak will go. That virtually no strengthening of public health system has taken place is evident from the fact that it has taken nearly three months after the lockdown was first imposed for the Union and the Delhi government to come together to seemingly take charge of the pandemic in the national capital; that the Supreme Court is belatedly forcing ramping up of testing facilities; and that after the harassed patients are being made to run from hospital to hospital for securing admission, the government is talking of controlling the cost of treatment in private hospital. There failures apart, there are serious issues of scientific integrity involved over here, the air around which should be clarified at the earliest to salvage the already battered confidence in the scientific bureaucracy of the country.

Authors of the study have claimed their linkages to PGIMER, Chandigarh, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, ICMR and The INCLIN Trust International. Authors also showed ICMR to be the only source of funding

for the study. Authors also acknowledged the inputs from National COVID Task Force-Operation Research Group members and prominent official of ICMR.

Given such strong claims it is not enough for ICMR to issue a bland statement that news reports attributing this study to ICMR being misleading. Everybody would like to know what ICMR is proposing to do about the authors who have made these claims. ICMR must come clean. If ICMR does not do anything, it will only increase the doubts of the medical and scientific community of the murky dealings of ICMR.

ICMR tweet also claims that the study “does not reflect the official position of ICMR”. Again, it is incumbent on ICMR as to what aspects of study do not reflect its official position. There is much appreciation of Govt. steps and, also some suggestions so ICMR must come forth which part or even whole of the study it feels does not reflect its position. ICMR must behave like a body of medical researchers and not diplomats; must display scientific approach and not obfuscation and deniability.

ICMR and other senior medical professionals have displayed utmost sycophancy to buttress the mishandling of the COVID19 pandemic by the Govt. Sycophancy is a milder term lest it shows their utter incompetence.

Progressive Medicos and Scientists Forum (PMSF) demands immediate answers from ICMR to these questions and show their accountability to the people.

PMSF holds that the leading personnel managing COVID response have shown their lack of suitability and reiterates that this responsibility is taken away from them and given to a team of eminent and upright public health professionals, with considerable representation of trained epidemiologists.

COVID pandemic poses serious challenge and demands serious action and not mere posing, posturing, and modelling.

-sd-

(Dr Harjit Bhatti)
National Convener PMSF

-sd-

(Dr Vikas Bajpai)
Member National Executive