Expert and Lay Perceptions of Translation of COVID-19 Treatment and Vaccine Development

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Introduction

Much work is currently underway trying to develop effective therapies and vaccines against COVID-19. Inaccurate public beliefs about therapeutic and preventive strategies can encourage self-medication and treatment hoarding, nonadherence with isolation measures, and refusal to participate in trials that may involve placebo arms. The goal of our project is to assess expert projections for the development of effective COVID-19 treatments and vaccines, and to determine how well these align with perceptions of the US and Canadian publics.

Design

The goal of our project is to elicit expert opinion about timelines for development of safe and effective COVID-19 medical countermeasures, and compare them with perceptions of a sample of US and Canadian publics. Our basic method is to approach a small sample of experts for most optimistic, most likely, and most pessimistic timelines for development for COVID-19 medical countermeasures. National panels of lay people in the US and Canada will complete the same survey. We will then report expert projections, and measure deviation between lay and expert projections. Our expert elicitations can be used to inform public communications and research planning; the comparison of lay and expert forecasts can be used to devise public communication strategies.

Protections For Participants

Our protocol has been reviewed and approved by McGill's Institutional Review Board (IRB). When responses are received, the predictions will be automatically recorded in our database. The names of expert participants will be retained for follow-up purposes, and will not be made public without explicit consent. No identifying information will be collected from lay participants.

Why Does This Work Matter?

This project will help policy makers and the public to better understand how long it will take for effective interventions against COVID-19 to be available, as well as to evaluate the potential for any setbacks in the process. Additionally, our work will help to provide insight into the public's

awareness of the challenges facing the research community during this crisis, and whether there has been a breakdown in communication about how swiftly research can progress and what the risk for errors is.

Who We Are

This study is being led by Jonathan Kimmelman, head of the STREAM research group and the James McGill Professor in the Division of Ethics and Policy / Social Studies of Medicine Department at McGill University. The co-investigators on the study are Brian Ward, Jesse Papenburg and Stephen B. Broomell. Brian Ward is a professor in the Division of Experimental Medicine in the Department of Medicine at McGill University. Jesse Papenburg is an assistant professor in the Department of Pediatrics at McGill University. Stephen B. Broomell is an assistant professor in the Department of Social and Decision Sciences at Carnegie Mellon University. The project manager is Patrick Kane, a postdoctoral fellow in the Biomedical Ethics Unit at McGill University.

Questions

Should you have questions or concerns about our study, please contact jonathan.kimmelman@mcgill.ca or patrick.kane@mcgill.ca.