

Editorial

Scientific Integrity Under Threat: The Role of the IDSA, PIDS, and SHEA Journals in an Evolving Political Landscape

The landscape of scientific publishing, education, and healthcare research is facing unprecedented challenges as political decisions increasingly encroach on academic freedom, data accessibility, and global health priorities. Recent policy changes in the United States, including the removal of key educational materials from government websites, funding freezes on global health initiatives such as PEPFAR, and restrictions on language use in scientific communications, present a significant threat to the integrity of scientific discourse. The implications of these policies extend beyond research institutions—they have real and lasting consequences for healthcare equity, evidence-based policy making, and the ability to address infectious diseases worldwide.

Scientific censorship and its consequences

One of the most alarming developments is the restriction of language and framing in scientific publications. Mandates that suppress discussions on critical health topics—including sexual and reproductive health, gender-based studies, and structural health inequities—amount to a form of institutionalized censorship. By limiting how scientists can communicate their findings, these policies skew the evidence base that informs public health decisions. This is particularly concerning for people with or at risk of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection as well as people who are transgender, who already face social stigma and structural barriers to care. Restricting research narratives further marginalizes these populations and hampers global efforts to address disparities in the prevention, treatment, and care of infectious diseases.

Impact on scientific publishing and knowledge dissemination

Scientific publishing relies on transparency, peer review, and an open exchange of ideas. Policies that limit access to data or restrict funding for certain areas of study create systemic biases in the research that reaches publication. The removal of key datasets and educational resources from public domains curtails the ability of researchers to build on existing knowledge, resulting in gaps in evidence that weaken public health interventions. Moreover, a hostile political climate may discourage researchers from pursuing high-impact studies in politically sensitive areas, effectively stalling progress in

critical fields such as climate-related infectious diseases, vaccine research, reproductive health, and harm reduction strategies.

Threats to global health equity and collaboration

International collaboration is the backbone of infectious diseases research, yet recent funding cuts and policy shifts, including plans for US withdrawal from the World Health Organization, threaten to erode these partnerships. The freeze on US foreign aid and global health initiatives, including PEPFAR, undermines decades of progress in the treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDS. Limiting financial support for global health programs not only weakens responses to infectious disease outbreaks but also exacerbates disparities in access to life-saving interventions in resource-limited settings. If the United States withdraws from global health leadership, other nations may follow, creating a ripple effect that endangers vulnerable populations worldwide.

Our commitment to an open and inclusive scientific discourse

As editors-in-chief, we reaffirm our journals' commitment to maintaining an open platform for scientific exchange, free from political interference. Our journals will continue to do the following:

1. Provide a forum for unfettered scientific discourse from researchers around the world. We will publish research that addresses pressing public health challenges, including studies that examine health disparities, marginalized populations, and politically sensitive topics. Our journals are open to all, provided they are publishing novel and impactful work and are responsive to the peer review process.
2. Support healthcare equity. In alignment with our missions, we will prioritize research that informs equitable healthcare policies and interventions, particularly in resource-limited settings and underserved communities.
3. Uphold the principles of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE). We will resist any attempts to limit the transparency, integrity, and accessibility of scientific publishing.
4. Amplify voices from the Global South. Recognizing the disproportionate impact of funding restrictions on low- and middle-income countries, we will continue to prioritize submissions from researchers in these regions, ensuring that their work receives the visibility and credibility it deserves.

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Call to action for the scientific community

The current climate demands that we, as scientists, educators, and healthcare professionals, remain vigilant and vocal in defending the principles of scientific integrity and global health equity. We must actively challenge policies that seek to suppress knowledge, advocate for continued access to research funding, and support journals and institutions that prioritize evidence-based, apolitical dissemination of science. Our journals stand firm in their role as platforms for rigorous, inclusive, and politically unencumbered scientific dialogue.

At a time when political pressures threaten to shape the boundaries of acceptable research, our collective response must be to broaden, not narrow, the scope of scientific inquiry. We invite

our colleagues to join us in this effort, ensuring that the pursuit of knowledge remains driven by facts, not by ideology.

Cosignatories

Gonzalo Bearman, Editor-in-Chief, *Antimicrobial Stewardship and Healthcare Epidemiology*

Roger Bedimo, Editor-in-Chief, *Open Forum Infectious Diseases*

David Calfee, Editor-in-Chief, *Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology*

Ravi Jhaveri, Editor-in-Chief, *Journal of the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society*

Paul Sax, Editor-in-Chief, *Clinical Infectious Diseases*

Cynthia Sears, Editor-in-Chief, *The Journal of Infectious Diseases*