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Cryptography in modern-day medical science*

For centuries people have been using encrypted messages to convey confidential information. During the process of encryption, a cipher (i.e., algorithm) is used to convert data into gibberish that can only be decoded with knowledge of the key required to decrypt the information. In today’s world of medical science, most scientists are still communicating with one another, mostly unintentionally, using coded messages when discussing and presenting experimental data. The current form of correspondence, generally referred to as publishing scientific papers, is held in high esteem and greatly sought after. Yet, the tried manner of presenting data conflicts with the aim of a rather novel development in the field of academic publishing, namely open-access journals. The main, and to my opinion valid, argument for this type of journal is that publicly funded research should be freely available to the general population. However, both scientists and journals do not provide the public with the key that is essential for deciphering research papers. As a result, experimental data are often misinterpreted and snippets of information can start living a life of their own. So, should we as scientists make an effort to provide the populace with the key to decrypt the epitome of our scientific endeavours — for instance, by applauding innovations such as the lay abstract — or should we stay on the beaten path and do our utmost to publish our incomprehensible findings in reputable journals with clear and easy to understand names such as Nature, Science or the Medical Journal of Australia? End of present filler.

*Note: This article contains an encrypted message. Can you decrypt it?

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doi:10.5694/mja12.11109