Correspondence

COVID-19: don't forget deaf people

The public needs to know how to recognize, report and contain the COVID-19 coronavirus if we are to bring the current pandemic under control. However, accurate dissemination of this crucial information among deaf communities is a problem because no universal signing vocabulary exists for the virus. We urge the World Health Organization to create an international signing convention for the coronavirus and the COVID-19 disease it causes.

We found that 15 or more different signs are currently being used to designate the coronavirus in countries affected by the pandemic. Brazil alone uses at least three. Some of these signs are based on unscientific variants that might, for example, evoke fear of an animal's bite. Even providing written information is unreliable because of the different levels of understanding of Portuguese — deaf citizens' second language — among communities.

Such haphazard communication is not acceptable. It stands to perpetuate misinformation and to foster misguided actions by the people affected — putting themselves and all of society at risk.

Helena Carla Castro* Biology Institute, Federal Fluminense University, Niterói, Brazil.
hcastro@id.uff.br
*On behalf of 4 correspondents. See go.nature.com/2wmxvbd

Brazil: a victory or researchers

Members of the Brazilian Academy of Sciences and the Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Science, backed by the national media, have narrowly averted a move by the ministry of education that could have been disastrous for researchers. The ministry had sought to limit the participation of scientists in national and international scientific meetings to just one or two per institution (see go.nature.com/2xtnxj and go.nature.com/2jemdy; both in Portuguese). In that event, Brazil's voice at the 16th World Congress on Public Health 2020, for example, would have been no more than a whisper in discussions of global-health emergencies such as the current COVID-19 pandemic.

In a letter to the ministry (see go.nature.com/3agpq9s; in Portuguese), the members pointed out that a mere handful of delegates cannot do justice to important research done by many Brazilian scientists. With respect to the world congress, the ministry's ruling would have excluded at least 2,000 Brazilian academics who contributed to relevant topics such as the Zika virus (N. Faria *et al. Nature* **546**, 406–410; 2017) and the health impact of environmental disasters (R. J. Ladle *et al. Nature* **578**, 37; 2020).

Although scientists welcome the ministry's revocation of its ruling, concerns remain about the government's stance on Brazil's science and education (see, for example, *Nature* **572**, 575–576; 2019).

Leandro F. M. Rezende, **Gabriela A. Wagner** Federal University of São Paulo, Brazil.
leandro.rezende@unifesp.br

Grant lotteries: a winner responds

Contrary to the implication in your report, I am indeed grateful to have won a research grant from a lottery system (see *Nature* **575**, 574–575; 2019). The Health Research Council of New Zealand that awarded this grant funds proposals with "transformative" potential; applications are screened by a panel who ensure that the listed criteria have been met. I consider that this sort of high-risk, high-reward funding is ideally suited to a lottery format. However, I am less enthusiastic about lottery schemes that do not apply any merit-based criteria.

I agree with your quote from economist Margit Osterloh that there is a need for greater humility in science, but I do not think that fostering humility should be more important to funders than seeking to identify the best proposals. If funding excellence remains the main goal, the core premise to support fully open lotteries must be that assessment panels are ineffective at identifying this.

This view does a disservice to those who volunteer their time for scant reward. My experience on New Zealand's funding review panels is overwhelmingly that members are collegial, hard-working and dedicated to identifying the best proposals. Science depends on such whole-hearted commitment.

David Ackerley Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.
david.ackerley@vuw.ac.nz

Asimov: dark side of a bright history

I have an issue with the brief aside in David Leslie's article on Isaac Asimov, in which he notes that "Asimov had his own egregious behaviour: the unapologetic harassing of women" (*Nature* **577**, 614–616; 2020). Although this is a step up from not mentioning Asimov's long history as a serial groper at all, it seems at best tone-deaf.

As a woman in science as well as a fan of science fiction, it gets pretty wearing to keep reading about these great men who just happened to regularly assault women. Particularly so in this case, in which Asimov is praised for his ethos and vision for humanity.

Lauren Lehmann University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, USA.
llehmann@uoregon.edu

HOW TO SUBMIT

Correspondence may be submitted to correspondence@nature.com after consulting the author guidelines and section policies at go.nature.com/cmchno.