

‘Nothingburger of a paper’ and why we still don’t know if anti-malarial drugs work against the coronavirus

Last week, I wrote about an experimental treatment for COVID-19 that repurposes old drugs. One version of the treatment uses chloroquine ... an anti-malaria drug that’s also used to treat autoimmune diseases. Another version, the one that at the time was getting the most press, claimed that the combination of hydroxychloroquine ... and the antibiotic azithromycin ... could completely render SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, undetectable in patients. As I described, it was a [horrible, horrible study](#)... .

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I wasn’t planning on writing about this particular issue again, but then I observed two developments. First, Professor Didier Raoult ... published another trial that’s being flogged as evidence that his combination works. Second, in the conspiracy fever swamps on social media and even on traditional media an emerging narrative was being promoted late last week.

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Basically, this is a nothingburger of a paper. It studied patients with low severity or even asymptomatic COVID-19 disease, the vast majority of whom would likely have cleared the virus just as fast without the medications. Again, this is such a useless paper, even as an observational paper, that it tells us, in essence, nothing new.

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I fear that, when all is said and done, the COVID-19 pandemic will be the single greatest opportunity for grifters and snake oil salesmen I’ve seen in my lifetime. Until a vaccine and/or effective treatment is developed, the grift will continue.

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