

Do you have any sense of what prompted the journal to action now?

Yes. On September 26, 2024 retractionwatch published a [story](#) about a correction that failed to address the core issues of the study, along with an editorial that suggested the authors lacked a fundamental understanding of what homeopathy entails. The turning point came when we formally submitted a complaint to the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), signed by Harald Sitte, Professor of Pharmacology at the Medical University of Vienna. Our complaint highlighted the following concerns:

1. The journal published a study that omitted critical intervention details = the compositions and the dosage of the preparations administered to patients.
2. Despite receiving detailed evidence of data manipulation over two years prior, the Journal did not retract the study.
3. The journal ignored a “Letter to the Editor” that outlined substantive critiques of the study and failed to open a discussion on the matter. As noted in an editorial, other critical perspectives from readers were similarly excluded.
4. The journal did not respond to the request of 5 co-authors of the paper to have their names removed from the paper.
5. The published correction did not address the key flaws identified by the authors of the “Letter to the Editor” or the official investigation by ÖAWI (Austrian Agency for Scientific Integrity).
6. The journal’s investigation was superficial and perfunctory, particularly given the comprehensive information provided by the university. Moreover, it failed to engage with or refute the issues raised by both the Austrian Agency for Scientific Integrity (ÖAWI) and the authors of the “Letter to the Editor”.

In response to our complaint, COPE intervened on February 19, 2025, directing The Oncologist to engage with the ÖAWI and the Medical University of Vienna. This marked the first instance in which the journal demonstrated a willingness to participate in a professional dialogue with its critics. Following COPE’s recommendation, a video conference was held on June 17, 2025 between representatives of Meduni Vienna, ÖAWI, and the journal “The Oncologist”. During this meeting, the critics’ arguments were presented to Susan Bates, Chief Editor of The Oncologist.

And how do you think the journal has handled the whole affair?

We welcome the retraction of the paper as an important step toward upholding scientific integrity in oncology. During the prolonged period before the retraction, the study continued to circulate, potentially misleading both the medical community and patients. The handling of this matter was deeply flawed for several key reasons:

(i) Inadequate Pre-Publication Scrutiny

Given the study’s fundamental methodological limitations and lack of scientific plausibility, its acceptance for peer review in a reputable oncology journal raises significant questions. Studies that do not meet basic standards of evidence-based medicine—such as those lacking clear intervention details or reproducible data—typically warrant early rejection to uphold the integrity of the publication process. The unusually rapid acceptance timeline (submitted July 9, 2020;

accepted September 28, 2020) further underscores the need for a thorough examination of the review process.

ii. Suppression of Critical Voices

Critics were systematically denied a platform for discussion. Despite submitting a Letter to the Editor on May 2, 2021—co-authored by a clinical oncologist and accompanied by a submission fee—the journal neither published the letter nor responded to its substantive arguments. To this day, there has been no acknowledgment or engagement with the concerns raised.

None of the corrections really addressed the arguments put forward by ÖAWI or us. We got the impression that the journal simply published the lead author's explanations uncritically.

On September 24, 2024, The Oncologist invited Harald Sitte to write a commentary on the matter, which would, however, be subject to the journal's "standard peer review and acceptance process in accordance with its policies." The commentary, which contained several criticisms of the study, was submitted on January 7, 2025, sent to two reviewers on January 23, 2025, and a result was promised in three weeks. The peer review was not completed until June 2025. Since then, Harald Sitte has requested the reviewers' results on an almost monthly basis. The journal has never responded. The publication of criticism is once again being delayed, or perhaps ultimately prevented.

This case is a textbook example of how journals should not deal with criticism from readers.

The retraction of the study by The Oncologist is a long-overdue and necessary step to uphold the integrity of scientific literature. The journal's explicit statement that it 'no longer has confidence in the results and conclusions' validates the substantial, long-standing concerns raised about the study's methodology and findings. A study whose methods and conclusions have been widely criticized and deemed unsound must not serve as a basis for medical decision-making - patient well-being must always be the priority.

From the outset, the Medical University of Vienna has advocated for a thorough and transparent examination of the allegations and has emphasized the need to address the substantive criticisms raised. The protracted nature of this process underscores the importance of vigorously defending scientific standards - even in the face of resistance. This case demonstrates that only through persistent engagement and rigorous peer review can the credibility of medicine be preserved. It also serves as a reminder of our collective responsibility to safeguard the evidence-based and scientific foundations of medical practice.

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November 29, 2025,

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