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PEARLS OF LABORATORY MEDICINE

Publication Ethics

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On behalf of the IFCC Task Force on Ethics

DOI:10.15428/CCTC.2016.254797



Publication Ethics: Definition

- the ethical behaviour surrounding writing and submission of a scientific manuscript for publication; typically in a peer-reviewed journal

Who Manages Publication Ethics on a Global Scale?

- The **Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)** and the **World Association of Medical Editors (WAME)** are the main guardians of ethical conduct
- However, all Journal Editors and Publishing Houses are very active
- Multiple societies and professional organizations contribute to the generation of ethics guidelines



Who Are Your Co-Authors? And Should They Even Be an Author?

- To be allowed to be an Author you **must** be involved with:
 1. **substantial** contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data
AND
 2. **drafting** the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content
AND
 3. **approval** of the final version to be published
AND
 4. **accountable** for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved
- Authors should meet **all four** conditions. If not, that person should **not** be an author, but an acknowledged individual.
- General principles on Authorship: First author, last author, missing authors, and extra authors

Citations/References/Intellectual Property Rights

- Using other people's material in the right and the wrong way
 - ✓ Always cite other people's ideas or results
 - ✓ Quotes may be used if "clearly marked" and cited
 - ✓ Get permission for reuse of tables and figures
 - ✗ Do not copy work without citation
 - ✗ Do not use figures without permission

- What is plagiarism?

Self-Citations

What is considered “acceptable use” of your own earlier material?

- You must mention all your relevant previous work briefly and give citations
- Do not be selective or only mention a few papers due to space or modesty
- Reproducing your earlier published figures or tables needs permission from the publisher of the original article even though you probably made the figure or table yourself. This is due to copyright (or ©) issues.

Unacceptable Use of Your Earlier Material?

- Self Plagiarism or Duplicate Publishing
 - Do not mention your previous work without a citation
 - Do not take blocks of text and reuse them in your next paper. Readers have the “expectation of originality.”
 - Reusing material previously published by yourself without citation is called “duplicate publishing,” “self-plagiarism,” “redundant publication,” or “recycling fraud.”
- Is it possible to republish my foreign language article in English?
 - Yes, if done correctly.

Plagiarism Detection Tools and Graphics Checking Software

CrossCheck

- CrossCheck checks submitted manuscripts against millions of previously published papers, checking for plagiarised text.
- Journal not in CrossCheck? Researchers often spot unethical behavior and report it. No time limit on correcting or retracting unethical scientific papers – even decades later.

Office of Research Integrity (ORI)

- The US Office of Research Integrity (ORI) has created a graphics-checking software plug-in for Photoshop, freely available and used by publishers the world over.

Conflicts of Interest (COI)?

Aim for Transparency

- Any results and discussion in a paper, which may have benefits to any of the authors, is a possible conflict of interest.
- Potential conflicts of interest have to be dealt with at the time of submission. Editors and referees can take this potential conflict of interest into consideration whilst peer-reviewing any submitted paper.
- Having a conflict of interest is not in itself unethical. Full transparency and disclosure is the best course of action.

US Government Perspective

- “The general standard for judging whether a conflict of interest situation exists is whether a reasonable person with knowledge of all the relevant facts would have reason to question your impartiality in the matter.”
- Many journals have Conflict of Interest statements in their submission guidelines.

COI Examples

- Most obvious COIs are financial relationships: employment, stock ownership, grants, and patents
- Indirect COIs include honoraria, consultancies to sponsoring organizations, mutual fund ownership, and paid expert testimony
- Examples:
 - Receiving funds from a company to conduct research and also owning stock in that company
 - Speaking at industry-sponsored workshops on same topic as your research paper
 - Prior research projects on another product funded by the same company must also be declared
- Less obvious COIs: personal relationships, academic competition, and biased opinion. Examples:
 - Relative who works at the company whose product the researcher is evaluating
 - Self-serving stake in the research results
 - Personal beliefs that are in direct conflict with the research topic

Full transparency and disclosure is the best course of action



Submit Your Paper Ethically

Parallel submissions to save time? No.

- Parallel submission is a duplicate submission, and unethical
- Each submission of the same paper, or the same research results and discussion, **must** be sequential
- In a hurry? Withdraw your paper and then go elsewhere – not before

Involve co-authors

- Each co-author must be in agreement with the entire contents of the paper, both at the initial submission stage, and with any revised versions of the paper
- Some journals ask for signed declarations from all named authors



Authors Have a Responsibility to Act Ethically

- It is up to the authors to know!
 - It is up to authors to act in an ethical manner and know what is and is not allowed
 - Ignorance is no excuse
 - There are several useful resource sites on the web, such as the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) website, the Publishing Ethics Resource Kit (PERK), etc
- **If in doubt, ask!**



Referees Have to Act Ethically Too

Referees should peer-review impartially and confidentially

- The peer-review process is single-blind, so referee identity is confidential
- Referees must not contact the author directly, but handle through the editor of the journal
- If a referee thinks that he/she might have a conflict of interest, the review should be refused, and the editor informed

After the peer-review is finished and comments sent in, the electronic file and any printouts of the submission must be destroyed by the referee to maintain confidentiality

- The published version of the article is the only valid version

Editors Have to Uphold Ethics As Well

COPE viewpoint:

“Editors should be accountable for everything published in their journals. This means the editors should: strive to meet the needs of readers and authors; strive to constantly improve their journal; have processes in place to assure the quality of the material they publish; champion freedom of expression; maintain the integrity of the academic record; preclude business needs from compromising intellectual and ethical standards; always be willing to publish corrections, clarifications, retractions and apologies when needed.”

- Journal editors have the responsibility of addressing any complaints about specific articles published in that journal. Papers can be retracted by the Editor following a breach of ethics by the author(s).

Editors must have no Conflict of Interest

Readers Have a Responsibility Too

If, whilst reading various articles in a journal, a reader finds a suspected breach of ethics, he/she should contact the journal's editor, with specific suspicions or comments and (if possible) supportive evidence.

- The journal editor should acknowledge this, instigate a suitable investigation, and wherever possible, advise the reader of the final outcome.
- Journal Editors who do not investigate suspected breaches of ethics can be reported to COPE for further action

Responsibilities of Publishers and Publishing Societies

- Have a responsibility to the scientific record to ensure the journals they publish are as free as possible from publishing ethics violations.
- Publishers and Publishing Societies should:
 - Respect the privacy and rights of researchers
 - Protect the intellectual property and copyright of the authors
 - Foster the editorial independence of the publishing process without interference by themselves or any other party

What Do You Do If You, As an Author, Are a Victim of Ethical Abuse?

- **Plagiarism:**

- If your paper has been plagiarised, contact the Editor of the journal the other article appeared in
- Contact the Publisher of the journal your article appeared in
 - they often hold copyright and can help you
- Retractions of plagiarised papers take place when the ethical breach is discovered or confirmed

- **Missing as a Co-Author:**

- If you think that you should be a co-author, quickly contact the Editor of the journal in which the paper appeared
- Papers get corrected by publishing Corrigenda or Errata to reflect such changes



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Disclosures/Potential Conflicts of Interest

Upon Pearl submission, the presenter completed the Clinical Chemistry disclosure form. Disclosures and/or potential conflicts of interest:

- **Employment or Leadership:** Elsevier, Senior Publisher
- **Consultant or Advisory Role:** None declared
- **Stock Ownership:** None declared
- **Honoraria:** None declared
- **Research Funding:** None declared
- **Expert Testimony:** None declared
- **Patents:** None declared



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