
EDITORIAL

Publication ethics and the *EJSO*

Honesty and integrity underpin scientific publication. *EJSO* is a journal of record which seeks to apply the highest standards to the selection and acceptance of papers submitted to the Editorial Team for scrutiny and printing. As such, we are members of the Committee on Publication Ethics, COPE, as are many of our sister and competitor journals. The application of high standards of Ethics strengthens the scientific base, the reputation of the journal and its authors, and the trust of the reading public.

A lack of honesty and integrity may undermine scientific publication in a number of ways, both in the conduct of research and in the subsequent efforts to achieve publication. Research misconduct is defined by COPE (W1) as behaviour by a researcher, intentional or not, that falls short of good ethical and scientific standards. Individual editorial teams with limited resources face considerable difficulties in policing publication ethics and detecting research fraud. For this reason, COPE was founded in 1997 'to provide a sounding board for editors', in committee and by correspondence. It published a pamphlet on *Guidelines on Good Publication Practice* in 1999. Editors are now able to present a more unified approach to the problems of misconduct, through COPE, to which many journals are now affiliated (W1) and through the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME).

Some examples of misconduct are absolute, such as the fabrication or falsification of data, plagiarism of work or text without acknowledgement, and duplicate publication. Others can be more subtle, and indeed can change with time as social, ethical and professional expectations change. These include failure to get consent from an ethics committee, gift authorship, undisclosed

conflicts of interest, or 'salami slicing' of a piece of work to maximize the number of publications. Other practices which may detract from the quality of the scientific base may include publication of fortuitous post-hoc statistical findings, and the failure to publish completed research or clinical trials, although these examples might not generally be considered as misconduct per se.

Better standards are ensured by the promotion of good research as much as in the policing and detection of bad research. COPE sets out an ambitious long-term strategy to achieve this promotion of ideals, through education, training and advice at all levels from the undergraduate curriculum; through investigation of allegations of misconduct, and through advice to employers and supervisory bodies, including disciplinary procedures. Disciplinary procedures and sanctions available to Editors are currently somewhat limited, but can at least involve highlighting the misconduct in print. In future, we might envisage a database of misconduct cases which Editors might consult. Meanwhile, with our limited resources as a part-time Editorial Board, we continue to be dependant upon the vigilance of our readers to report problems and to spot duplicate publication, for example.

EJSO continues to develop. The Journal is ultimately a collective expression of the interests and aspirations of its readers, its authors and its editorial team. By setting and aiming for high standards of practice, aided and guided by the work of COPE, we all advance together.

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Web Reference

W1. [http://www.bmjpg.com/publication ethics/cope](http://www.bmjpg.com/publication%20ethics/cope)