

Ethics in Publishing: Keeping an Eye on Propriety

Olusegun Ojo FMCPATH

Department of Morbid Anatomy and Forensic Medicine, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

Academic publishing record remains a key performance indicator in deciding appointments and promotions to academic posts and positions the world over.

In modern times, publications are often quoted in efforts to gain commercial advantage among competing proprietary preparations. Thus, the popular aphorism 'publish or perish' has gained a life of its own and often drives unethical behavior among rivals and peers.

An author of any scientific or professional publication needs not only to be a competent researcher, he also needs to be careful, honest and truthful in ensuring that his publication is genuine and its deductions, conclusions and recommendations are true to life and, in the case of medical publications, such that would not endanger life.

Certainly, fraudulent publications demean science and misleads others and society; it is wasteful of resources and may have adverse effects on clinical practice and patient care. These are reasons to ensure the purity of and robustness of scientific record and Journals should ensure the truthfulness of published material as vehicle for the advancement of knowledge.

At the onset of its life, we feel that is essential that the Annals of Tropical Pathology (ATP) should espouse and uphold high ethical publication standards. In our view, authorship issues, data manipulation and plagiarism are the most prominent among the slew of malfeasances that afflict scientific publications, especially locally but also internationally.

Authorship Issues

It is not uncommon that writers 'award' authorship as favour to their friends and colleagues on publications. It is so rife that many Journals have published strict guidelines for their prospective writers¹. Guidelines for authorship credit have been spelt out elsewhere². ATP would require that all authors are aware of and approve of the contents of every submitted manuscript. This means that they partook in the conception and/or data collection and analysis and/or writing of the publication in question. They therefore would, in addition to benefiting from the credits due, be liable for whatever defects, inaccuracies and errors that may afflict the publication, should any be found. We would insist on having the e. mail addresses of all authors so we could confirm that these requirements are met at all times.

Correspondence to: Professor Olusegun Ojo, *Editor-in-Chief*, Department of Morbid Anatomy and Forensic Medicine, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria *Tel.:* +234 803 318 5702 *E-mail:* segunojo@gmail.com

Plagiarism

This undesirable publication practice is turning out to be quite as common in our country as has been reported in other parts of the world. Put most simply, Plagiarism is the incorporation of someone else's work without providing adequate credit³. According to the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), "plagiarism ranges from the unreferenced use of others published ideas ... to submission under "new" authorship of a complete paper, sometimes in a different language"⁴. While an author may understandably re-use some of his previously published material, reproduction of entire ideas and manipulation of data, illustration and images are to be seen as (self) plagiarism and is equally unacceptable.

COPE and Its Guidelines and Flowcharts

The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE www.researchethics.org) was set up more than a decade ago to combat plagiarism and other publication vices by fostering the understanding of research ethics among editors and authors and by so doing, promote ethical standards in research and scientific publication. The *Annals of Tropical Pathology* has applied to become a member of COPE. We would recommend that our prospective authors visit COPE's website to view the series of flowcharts of how to manage ethical breaches. We wholly

endorse these flowcharts and shall use them whenever we encounter such misdemeanour as they describe.

Our Stand

In consonance with our vision of becoming a Journal of high repute and world acclaim, we would seek to maintain the highest ethical practices and would equip ourselves with every available tool in order to ensure the integrity of all our published articles and other publications. We invite you to join us in this honourable duty.

References

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