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## Re-emphasizing the publication ethics

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## RE-EMPHASIZING THE PUBLICATION ETHICS

Saba Sohail and Jamshed Akhtar\*

The last few years have witnessed a tremendous surge in the "publish-or-perish" culture in local biomedical community as evidenced by the increase in the number of national and internationally recognized Pakistani journals and the proportion of primary research publications. However, the editors have come to face an important issue of fraudulent publications. The term "fraudulent" in medical literature is defined in various ways and following are the most common examples of fraudulent publication practices.<sup>1</sup>

1. Willful submission of false and fabricated data.
2. Submission of data copied from others' work.
3. False denial of concurrent submission to multiple contemporary journals.
4. Sponsoring a manuscript containing data not under the sponsors' control.
5. Co-authorship without a significant contribution.
6. Deliberate omission of a reference to a published work which set priority or the source of inspiration.
7. Falsification of any declaration on the copyright form.
8. Failure to disclose potential conflict of interest with a sponsoring agency.

Fraudulent publications have been a universal menace. In 1992 the National Academy of Sciences (USA) recommended that 'scientific societies and journals should provide and expand resources and forums to foster responsible research practices and address misconduct in science and questionable research practices'.<sup>2</sup> Office of Research Integrity (ORI), USA, is one such forum that detects scientific frauds. Its guidance document for the editors is available at <http://ori.dhhs.gov>.

Authors, as well as the editors, shoulder the responsibility to promote intellectual and research integrity. Although it is nearly impossible to authenticate and verify every research communication, claimed to be original, the availability of electronic version of contemporary publications on Internet, globally, has now led to an increasing detection of such cases. The reviewers of JCPSP are renowned doctors and specialists in their respective field, who, alongwith our valued readers, have been playing an important role in identifying fraudulent publications.

Another important issue is how to proceed further if such an article is identified. The Western practice is primarily to make a published notice and make author(s) withdraw the article, while the scientific community stops citing the tainted article. In the infamous Slutsky case, who published false cardiology data in the 1970's and 80's general news items and contemporary reviews for revalidation of his results, were the most effective way in dealing with this issue. Retraction of article was least effective in this regard.<sup>3</sup> This policy of retraction is not practiced uniformly by all the periodicals. The reason put forward is that errata and retractions are published in latter issues, so it may not be possible for a reader to know the actual status of an article until it is well publicized.

The issue that now surfaces is how to deal with an article whose credibility is questioned and what steps are to be taken, if it finally turned out to be a fraud document. Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC), the regulatory body of medical education and the one that recognizes periodicals according to laid down criteria in Pakistan, should take an initiative in this regard. A meeting of editors of scientific journals at national level can at least set future guidelines in this regard. In addition, the legal position and benefits received by such an individual needs to be clarified, which may not be an easy task. The identification of such individuals indulging in unethical practice and making it public, probably in itself is a penalty.

This editorial has attempted to clarify and alert our present and future contributors towards their responsibility. In order to establish the authenticity and validity of the research from Pakistan, it is imperative to prevent a false, fabricated, copied or uncontributed work from surfacing.

## REFERENCES

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