What to do if you suspect fabricated data

(a) Suspected fabricated data in a submitted manuscript

Reviewer expresses suspicion of fabricated data

Thank reviewer, ask for evidence (if not already provided) and state your plans to investigate

Consider getting a 2nd opinion from another reviewer

Assemble evidence of fabrication

Contact author to explain concerns but do not make direct accusation

Author replies

No response

Attempt to contact all other authors (check Medline/Google for emails)

Author replies

No response

Contact author's institution requesting your concern is passed to author's superior and/or person responsible for research governance, if necessary coordinating with co-authors' institutions

No response

Contact regulatory body (e.g. GMC for UK doctors) requesting an enquiry

Inform all authors that you intend to contact institution/regulatory body

Inform reviewer of outcome

Contact author's institution(s) requesting an investigation

No or unsatisfactory response

Author cleared

Author found guilty

Reject

Inform reviewer of outcome

If raw data are supplied these should be assessed by a suitably qualified person, ideally in cooperation with the author's institution

Request raw data/lab notebooks as appropriate

Unsatisfactory answer/admits guilt

Satisfactory explanation

Apologise to author, inform reviewer(s) of outcome Proceed with peer-review if appropriate

No response

Apologise to author, proceed with peer-review if appropriate

Inform author's institution(s) requesting an investigation

Author cleared

Author found guilty

Reject

Inform reviewer of outcome

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