What to do if you suspect an ethical problem with a submitted manuscript

Reviewer (or editor) raises ethical concern about manuscript

Thank reviewer and say you plan to investigate

Author(s) supplies relevant details

Satisfactory answer

Apologise and continue review process

Unsatisfactory answer/no response

Inform author that review process is suspended until case is resolved

Consider submitting case to COPE if it raises novel ethical issues

Forward concerns to author’s employer or person responsible for research governance at institution

Issue resolved satisfactory

Inform reviewer about outcome of case

No/unsatisfactory response

Contact institution at 3–6 monthly intervals, seeking conclusion of investigation

No/unsatisfactory response

Refer to other authorities (e.g. medical registration body, UKPRI, ORI)

e.g. lack of ethical approval/concern re: patient consent or protection/concern re: animal experimentation

e.g. request evidence of ethical committee/IRB approval/copy of informed consent documents

Satisfactory answer

Unsatisfactory answer/no response

Inform reviewer about outcome of case

No/unsatisfactory response

Refer to other authorities (e.g. medical registration body, UKPRI, ORI)