



Forum agenda

**Meeting to be held on Tuesday 23 September 2014, 3–5pm (British Summer Time)
BY WEBINAR**

1. Update on COPE activities by the Chair

2. Forum discussion topic: Standard retraction form

<http://publicationethics.org/forum-discussion-topic-comments-please-0>

3. New cases

**14-07 Authors' contributions and involvement by medical communications
company (IP)**

14-08 Institutional review board approval needed? (JC)

4. Updates

14-06 Possible breach of reviewer confidentiality

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2. Forum discussion topic: Standard retraction form

(<http://publicationethics.org/forum-discussion-topic-comments-please-0>)

Hervé Maisonneuve, Université de Lyon, France, suggests a standard retraction form and would like feedback from COPE members.

Background:

Retractions are often used as a proxy for publication quality. Retractions have been studied with cohorts of various sizes over differing time periods.

Time after time these studies have pointed out that there is often no clearly stated reason for retraction and when given these reasons are often lacking in detail. The difficulty with interpretation has never been quantified, however an absence of explanation was cited for 5–12% of retraction notices.¹

Following our study on retraction notices issued in 2008, we recommended the use of a retraction template.² This template would meet the pre-requisites for the COPE retraction guidelines³ using very simple tick boxes: who is retracting the article, the reason for the retraction and history of errata/ expressions of concern. Then, a free text box would allow the editor to add any information they consider useful. A copy of the form can be downloaded here.

1. Decullier E, Samson G, Huot L. [Retractions due to errors and frauds]. *Presse Med.* 2012; **41**(9 Pt 1): 847-52.
2. Decullier E, Huot L, Samson G, Maisonneuve H. Visibility of retractions: a cross-sectional one-year study. *BMC research notes.* 2013; **6**: 238.
3. COPE. Retraction guidelines. 2009. [cited June 2014]; Available from: <http://www.publicationethics.org/files/retraction%20guidelines.pdf>

STANDARD RETRACTION FORM

Reference of the retracted article: _____

Retraction Date:

_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_
Day		Month		Year			

Retraction requested by (multiple response allowed):

- All authors
- Some of the authors. Specify: _____
- Editor as requested by
 - Institution
 - Reader
 - Other. Specify: _____
- Journal's owner

Date of the request:

_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_
Day		Month		Year			

Retraction type (multiple response allowed):

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fraud | <input type="checkbox"/> Plagiarism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inconsistent data | <input type="checkbox"/> Overlap |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Honest error: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> Irreproducible<input type="radio"/> Analytical error<input type="radio"/> Lab error<input type="radio"/> Other. Specify: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Property or legal concern |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Authorship | <input type="checkbox"/> Ethics |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Editorial reasons |



Invalidating the results



Not invalidating the results

only one tick is allowed in this column

History:

- History of expression of concern. Ref: _____
- History of corrections. Ref: _____

Comments:

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3. NEW CASES

14-07 Authors' contributions and involvement by medical communications company(IP)

The editorial office was contacted by someone who indicated that s/he has been working with a medical communications company on several manuscripts and has become concerned about the minimal extent of the authors' contributions to manuscripts handled by the company. The work requested by the company goes beyond language editing, and involves developing parts of manuscripts into narrative on the basis of an outline, and also the addition of references. Based on responses from authors, our contact was also concerned about authors' level of understanding of the work and study design being reported in the manuscript. Our contact has been asked to respond to reviewers' comments on behalf of authors.

We asked for details of the manuscripts this person worked on; one is currently under consideration by the journal. On submission, the authors declared language editing assistance by this company, but not developmental editing. The cover letter included several inaccuracies about the work reported in the manuscript. After being queried about these errors, the authors acknowledged that they followed a template for the cover letter provided by the company and that it was their first time writing a paper of this type.

Our contact has been willing to work with us on the basis that we will maintain anonymity. We feel that there are sufficient concerns about the contributions to the manuscript that we should confront the authors about this point—however, this will reveal that we have had interactions with the person involved in the editing.

Question(s) for the COPE Forum

- Should we proceed to contact the authors regarding the contributions to the manuscript?
- What is our duty towards the person who raised the concerns to our attention?
- Are there any steps that we can take to identify this type of situation in the future?

14-08 Institutional review board approval needed? (JC)

A graduate student submitted a paper to a journal and noted that in her country, unless the research is directly medical, institutional review board (IRB) approval is not required or completed. The journal has a policy of requiring IRB approval on any human subjects' research. This study was looking at practitioners and their work with students having a particular diagnosis.

The editor received a note from the author with the information that in the country of origin, no ethical approval was required on a master's thesis. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles of the Helsinki declaration. The author noted that the results of the master's thesis might be of importance and could make a contribution to the literature. It was supported by the university that sponsored the thesis but had not gone through an IRB.

Question(s) for the COPE Forum

- Is there ever a time when IRB approval should not be required before review and publication of research?
- How strictly should the editor adhere to these requirements? With this submission, it would be an automatic reject without IRB approval.

4. UPDATES

14-06 Possible breach of reviewer confidentiality (JM)

Background:

Soon after rejecting a paper—after it underwent peer review but before discussion at the manuscript meeting—the author wrote to tell me that he was asked questions “about the manuscript” at a presentation at a national meeting. The author stated: “A member of the audience addressed questions to me from a copy of the manuscript, and not from the talk I gave. I had to ask him to say nothing further and that reading from the unpublished manuscript was not appropriate, particularly with the manufacturer [of the drug] present who continues to press us for the data. I then realised that this person had a copy of our manuscript because they were either a reviewer or a reviewer had given them a copy”.

Our journal has an open review policy so the author was aware of the identity of the reviewers and knew that the person who asked the question was not one of the reviewers. The authors are concerned that one of the reviewers may be a colleague or collaborator with the person who asked the question.

After receiving the author’s letter, I emailed the two reviewers to inform them of our concern about confidentiality and to ask if they shared the manuscript or its contents and, if so, how and why. Within a few hours, both reviewers replied that they kept the paper confidential and did not share it with anyone else. We take their assertions as valid and true, as we do with so many other statements by authors and reviewers.

I informed the authors about the outcome of my investigation. I also suggested that if they still think that a reviewer may have broken confidentiality, they might wish to contact the editors of the other two journals where the paper was reviewed before submission to us as well as the editor of the journal currently reviewing the manuscript.

Question(s) for the COPE Forum

Do you think that the journal handled this correctly?

Advice:

There seems to have been some form of breach of confidentiality, but it is not clear where this has occurred. Sometimes reviewers do share papers with colleagues or students, but this is breaking confidentiality. As there is no strong evidence that a reviewer at this journal did in fact break confidentiality, the Forum cautioned about making allegations with the lack of evidence. Also, the editor noted that the paper has been through several journals, so if there was a breach, it could have happened at any of the journals, or it could even have occurred at a grant review for example.

The Forum agreed that the editor has done all he can to ensure there was no breach of confidentiality at his journal. Of course, the author may wish to pursue it further, but there is nothing more for the editor to do.

The editor noted that the instructions to authors in his journal do carry a clear message that reviewers should inform the journal if anyone else is involved in the review process, and that reviewers should maintain confidentiality.

The Forum noted that COPE does have a set of guidelines for reviewers "[Ethical guidelines for peer reviewers](#)" and would recommend them to all editors. They have been very well received and are a very useful resource for editors and reviewers. Editors may like to include them in their instructions for reviewers.

Follow-up:

The editor considers the case now closed.