

ethical editing

Theme: Correcting the Literature

Hard work pays off

Awards, records, and a winning team—all are associated with the 2012 Summer Olympics, to be held in London from July 27 to August 12. But athletes aren't the only people who work hard to achieve goals. This year, COPE, too, has been busy in London and around the world, receiving awards, dealing with records, and putting together a winning team.

In May, COPE received the Council of Science Editors Award for Meritorious Achievement (see page 2), in great part due to the efforts of Liz Wager and Sabine Kleinert, who received their own thanks from COPE at the March 2012 Annual General Meeting (see photo below).

Records broken at the Olympic Games are a cause for celebration. Unfortunately, some records are less positive, as you'll see on page 6, where the results of 168 publications by researcher Yoshitaka Fujii have been called into question by the editors of 23 peer-reviewed journals.

COPE's 2012 European Seminar brought together editors from many countries of the world to discuss an important theme: correcting the literature (pages 4 and 5). Presentations by Andrew Sugden of *Science*, Ed Pentz of CrossRef, and attorney Joss Saunders of Blake Lapthorn were featured.

This issue also features seminar reports by Kusal Das and Angel Magar, COPE's first two scholarship recipients (pages 7 and 8). As Angel concluded: "This scholarship provides an opportunity to interact and learn from scholars who have spent their lives working to improve publication ethics in the world."

And as of May 2012, COPE has a record number of Council members working to improve publication ethics. See the new members of COPE's winning team on page 3!



COPE Editor Jeannie Wurz and Administrator Linda Gough prepare to welcome attendees at the March 2012 European Seminar



Jeannie

In appreciation of their many years of service on the COPE Council, outgoing Chair Liz Wager (right) and Vice Chair Sabine Kleinert (left) received framed, two-page, personalized versions of Ethical Editing at the COPE Annual General Meeting in March 2012.

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COPE wins CSE award

At a ceremony held on May 21, 2012, during its annual meeting in Seattle, the Council of Science Editors (CSE) awarded its 2012 CSE Award for Meritorious Achievement—its highest honor—to COPE. The purpose of the award is to “highlight the goals of CSE, particularly the efforts made to improve scientific communication through the pursuit of high standards in all activities connected with editing” In accepting the award, COPE Chair Virginia (Ginny) Barbour said: “The importance of ethics, specifically publication ethics, has never been more critical in global research and publishing. COPE’s expansion in membership and activity is a reflection of how seriously editors worldwide take their role in ensuring standards of publication ethics are upheld.” Ginny and Council member André van Steirteghem are pictured above with the CSE award.

Guidelines for cooperation between journals and institutions

In March 2012, COPE released the document “Cooperation between research institutions and journals on research integrity cases: guidance from the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)”, drafted by outgoing Chair Elizabeth Wager and Vice Chair Sabine Kleinert on behalf of the COPE Council. The nine-page document, available at www.publicationethics.org/resources/guidelines, outlines the responsibilities of journals and institutions when faced with potential research misconduct.

COPE felt that there was a need for the guidelines first because a number of cases brought to the COPE Forum for discussion highlighted difficulties faced by editors who were trying to work with institutions on cases of possible misconduct, and second because literature showed that “editors do not always respond appropriately when informed by institutions about research misconduct findings.”

The guidelines, drafted with input from 45 individuals worldwide, are “based on the principle that institutions have responsibilities for the conduct of their researchers, which include investigating possible misconduct and applying appropriate sanctions, while journals are responsible for what they publish.”

Included in the document are a summary that lists the duties of institutions and editors, an introduction to the problem, background principles, a definition of misconduct, nine in-depth recommendations for cooperation between research institutions and journals, a list of references and further reading, and an acknowledgment of the individuals who contributed to the guidelines.

eLearning

The first four modules of the COPE eLearning course—Publication Ethics, Plagiarism, Fabrication, and Falsification—have been available to members since October 2011. To try them out, sign in on the COPE website (www.publicationethics.org), then choose Resources and eLearning. The modules all follow a well-defined structure, first defining the issue, then explaining how you can spot it, and finally giving you tools for addressing problems that are uncovered. Multiple-choice questions at various points allow you to review your knowledge. Further resources include web links and articles to help you further increase your understanding of the topic.



New COPE ombudswoman

Suzanne Morris, a Research Integrity Officer at the University of Queensland, Australia, was appointed COPE Ombudsman by the COPE Council in March 2012. An active researcher, author, and research education officer, Suzanne has published and presented on publication ethics at many conferences, particularly on the methods and tools that authors can use to prevent and manage disputes in the area of publications. As Ombudsman, Suzanne will be charged with handling complaints against COPE and disagreements among COPE members. She replaces Richard Green, whose term ended in March 2012.

COPE welcomes five new Council members!

Eleven candidates applied to fill the five open positions on the COPE Council. Four women and one man, hailing from four different countries, were elected by the membership to serve COPE over the next three years.



Charon Pierson is newly retired from academia at the University of Texas at El Paso and will continue as Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners*, which she has headed since 2000. Her journal was a beta tester for the integration of iThenticate® into the ScholarOne Manuscripts™ system for Wiley-Blackwell publishers, and in 2011 she produced a 5-part video lecture series on publication ethics designed for an academic audience (<http://nursing.utep.edu/resources/publication-ethics/>). In addition to a nursing background, Charon has a doctorate in sociology and advanced education in gerontology.



Since 2010, Mirjam Curno has worked full-time as the Managing Editor of the *Journal of the International AIDS Society*, based in Geneva, Switzerland. The journal “has a strong commitment to engaging actively with ethical issues in research, which are often encountered in the HIV field...” Mirjam has a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from the Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine in London and a PhD in Molecular Biology from the University of Dundee in the UK.



Rosemary Shinkai is an Associate Professor in the School of Dentistry at the nonprofit Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS), in the south of Brazil. Since 2008 she has served as Editor-in-Chief of *Revista Odonto Ciência (Journal of Dental Science)*, published by the university press EDIPUCRS, and in 2012 she began a two-year term as second treasurer of the Brazilian Association of Scientific Editors (ABEC). Rosemary has been a COPE member since 2010, and translated the COPE flowcharts into Brazilian Portuguese with Eleonor Lago of Scientia Medica.



Steven Shafer is Professor in the Department of Anesthesiology at Columbia University in New York and an Adjunct Professor at Stanford University and the University of California at San Francisco. He has served as Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Anesthesia & Analgesia* since 2006, and in this role has been directly involved in responses to three highly publicized cases of research fraud, including the retraction of dozens of studies published in his journal. “Nearly every aspect of our manuscript handling, our communications with authors, our guidelines for reviewers and editors, and our approach to academic misconduct has been influenced by the published guidelines from COPE and the advice of individual COPE Council members,” he says.



Zoë Mullan is a Senior Editor at *The Lancet* in London, and has served since 2002 as editor of the renowned weekly medical journal’s six-page Correspondence section. Among other tasks, she makes decisions on letters submitted for publication, writes editorials, solicits reviewers for peer review, and manages errata. “This role, by its nature,” she says, “exposes one to many academic disagreements and disputes, most of which resolve via the Correspondence pages, but some of which do not.”

COPE European Seminar on "Correcting the Literature"

COPE members traveled from as far away as Brazil, India and Pakistan to attend the 2012 European Seminar in London, where attendees discussed the many aspects involved in correcting the literature and problems that can arise. The meeting featured posters, breakout sessions to discuss cases, and presentations by Andrew Sugden of *Science*, Ed Pentz of CrossRef, and Joss Saunders of Blake Laphorn Solicitors (see below).



Andrew Sugden, Deputy Editor and International Managing Editor of *Science*, shared his journal's experience dealing with retractions and misconduct in a presentation titled "Retraction of scientific papers—The *Science* experience (the good, the bad and the ugly)". Sugden described three types of retractions: 1) "good" retractions, in which the authors initiate the retraction or agree to retract; 2) "bad" retractions, in which the authors disagree among themselves; and "ugly" retractions, in which the authors refuse to retract in spite of institutional findings.

Sugden named a number of "risk factors" for retractions, among them "research that is too clean"; multiple labs in multiple countries; and revisions that are returned suspiciously fast, especially when additional experiments are requested.

Following its retraction of two highly celebrated stem cell papers by Hwang et al. ("We were shaken by this," said Sugden), *Science* commissioned a committee to evaluate its peer review process. The journal adopted a number of policies as a result, including: all authors are notified of submission by e-mail; detailed conflict of interest disclosure is required from all authors before

acceptance; all figures are checked at revision; the statement "data not shown" is no longer allowed; authors must affirm they have participated in either research or writing of the paper; all data must be available to any reader of *Science*; and 3 or 4 interdisciplinary reviewers are consulted, rather than just two.

The journal has learned not to give in to pressure for instant correction or retraction. It is necessary to balance the need to notify readers and a fair process for authors, said Sugden. And: "We mustn't forget—because it is a gloomy subject—that most retractions are 'good' and most papers are good, too!"

"Obviously, when content changes, readers need to know," said Ed Pentz of CrossRef, who gave a talk titled "There is no final version". After demonstrating how hard it is to tell whether a published article has updates by looking at it on the journal's website, Pentz introduced CrossMark, a new service from CrossRef that can be used to alert readers when there is new information about a manuscript.

The interactive CrossMark symbol, which could conceivably appear



Ed Pentz of CrossRef

anywhere from PubMed to Google, can be clicked on to call up information from the publisher such as errata, corrigenda, enhancements, withdrawals, retractions, new editions, protocol updates, notices of concern, and more.

It is the publisher's responsibility to correct and update the literature, said Pentz, but journals post corrections in different ways, which is confusing for readers. CrossMark aims to simplify and standardize the process, so that important information is just a click away.

The CrossMark service was being piloted at the time of the European Seminar, and launch to CrossRef members was scheduled for April 2012.



“Correcting the academic record: the legal issues in corrections and retractions” was the title of the presentation by Joss Saunders, a member of the Publishing Law Team at Blake Lapthorn Solicitors in the United Kingdom. Saunders, who primarily offers support to large publishing houses, said that “very often my role is actually to stiffen the nerves of the editor.” He spoke primarily from the perspective of the law in England and Wales.

Saunders listed a number of legal rationales for correction and retraction, including plagiarism/copyright infringement, libel, lack of authority to publish, privacy and data protection, fraud, error (scientific, medical), and misrepresentation.

“Self plagiarism” is not usually a legal issue, as the author will not sue him or herself, Saunders said. However, under UK copyright law, joint authors must all consent to use of a work they have written. Thus publishers should ensure that all co-authors sign the copyright assignment/license form, or at least send an email agreeing to publication. Difficulties (Whose data is it? Whose article is it?) may still arise when authors change institutions.

Libel—saying or printing something about someone that they perceive as damaging their reputation—is quite a problem in Britain, said Saunders. “It’s the British disease.” Publishers should be careful not to libel an author through the wording of a correction or retraction. “Does it imply author dishonesty, when the facts may be in dispute?” In a case of libel, the burden is on the publisher to prove that



Joss Saunders of Blake Lapthorn

the statements are true, and secondary evidence is not admissible in court. Thus editors should be careful when making potentially libelous statements. “Do not copy your entire editorial board on emails regarding potential problems,” Saunders said. And editors should be aware that, because journals are now published online, they could potentially be sued in several different countries.

The Berne Convention (and most copyright laws) provide for the moral rights of identity (to be named as author, and conversely not to be wrongly named) and integrity (not to have the work changed), said Saunders. Are multiple authors correctly acknowledged? Are there ghost authors? Has the publisher altered the text (e.g., by a correction)? It is possible, Saunders said, that a change affecting the authors negatively could improve the work. Here, the integrity of the author must be weighed against the integrity of the work.



Angel Magar explains his poster



COPE Webmaster Cynthia Clerk, Operations Manager Natalie Ridgeway, and Administrator Linda Gough



Coffee, conversation, and COPE



Council members Behrooz Astaneh and André van Steirteghem



Three attendees from Brazil

Responding to publishing misconduct

Investigation into Fujii research

On April 9, 2012, the Editors-in-Chief of 23 peer-reviewed journals that had published research by Japanese researcher Yoshitaka Fujii sent a joint letter to 10 professors representing institutions that had employed Fujii, offering the institutions “the opportunity to attest to the integrity of any manuscript conducted under the auspices of your institution....” The letter was prompted by a manuscript published in the journal *Anaesthesia* that appeared to present “overwhelming evidence that the distributions of many variables reported by Dr Fujii, in 168 published trials . . . could not have occurred by chance” (Carlisle JB, The analysis of 168 randomised controlled trials to test data integrity. *Anaesthesia* 2012; 67: 521-537). Citing the COPE guidelines on cooperation between research institutions and journals on research integrity cases (see The Scoop from COPE, this issue), the Editors-in-Chief announced their intention to retract the presumably fraudulent research articles if they did not receive a reply from the institutions by June 30, 2012. The letter was posted on all of the journals’ websites in order to provide transparency to readers. In June 2012, *Anaesthesia* published a letter from Fujii, who stated that he is not a statistician and cannot comment on Carlisle’s analyses, but “we performed the tests over years with full honesty and integrity.” What happens next depends on the response in June.

Survey of retraction policies

by *Habeeb Ibrahim, Bangalore, India*

Scientists and researchers see the alarming increase in the number of retractions as a serious cause for concern, and as undermining confidence in scientific research. In COPE-funded research, Elizabeth

Wager and Peter Williams found that the majority of articles are retracted due to honest error or non-replicable findings, and that retraction practices are not uniform (*J Med Ethics* 2011;37: 567-570). Two editors at *Infection & Immunity* found that the higher a journal’s Impact Factor was, the higher its retraction rate (Fang & Casadevall, 2011; 79: 3855-3859). And a study published in the *Journal of Medical Ethics* came to the conclusion that retracted clinical trials put more patients at risk than other kinds of retracted medical research (Grant Steen R, 2012;38:228-232).

A 2004 study by Atlas showed that only 21% of 122 high-impact biomedical journals had a policy on article retraction (*J Med Libr Assoc*, 92(2): 242–250). Many publishers and membership organizations have started incorporating their own policies on retracting and withdrawing research papers. The COPE guidance on retractions clearly delineates when to consider an article for retraction, issue an expression of concern, or publish a correction/erratum (<http://tinyurl.com/75tmbok>). The International Association of Scientific, Technical & Medical Publishers (STM) guidelines differentiate between retraction and permanent removal of the article (<http://tinyurl.com/6n8hjm>). STM supports the removal of published material only in the case of (a) “an inappropriate violation of the privacy of a research subject, (b) errors to which a member of the general public might be exposed that, if followed or adopted, would pose a significant risk to health, or (c) a clearly defamatory comment made about others or about their work”. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) stresses the importance of archival of the retracted articles with libraries and publishers (<http://tinyurl.com/c2eraot>). The International Committee

of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) urges that the retraction, expression of concern, correction, and/or erratum be posted on numbered pages, quoting the original article, and be listed in the table of contents (http://www.icmje.org/publishing_2corrections.html). The World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) asks journals to inform not only readers but also indexing authorities about retracted articles (<http://www.wame.org/resources/publication-ethics-policies-for-medical-journals>). And the National Library of Medicine (NLM) produces a fact sheet for the citation of retracted articles in its databases (www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/factsheets/errata.html).

Among the publishers that have a policy statement on retraction are Elsevier, Wiley-Blackwell, Science Domain International, American Institute of Physics, Taylor & Francis, Springer, Royal Society Publishing, Mineralogical Society of America, BioMed Central, Society of Neuroscience, PLoS, and the American Geophysical Union.

Two editors call for changes

Two editors of the journal *Infection and Immunity*, Ferric C. Fang and Arturo Casadevall, are calling for changes in the scientific system to help stem the increase in retractions. An April 16, 2012, article by Carl Zimmer in the Science section of the *New York Times* (<http://tinyurl.com/dyan6s5>) reports on the problem of misconduct, and the editors’ call for reforms. Among other things, Fang and Casadevall suggested putting a cap on the number of grants a single lab can receive, ending the practice of giving credit for a scientific discovery to the first group that publishes, and encouraging universities to credit collaboration when deciding on promotions.

My experience at the European Seminar

by Kusal Das

It was a bit of a surprise to me when I received an e-mail from Ms. Linda Gough, COPE Administrator, announcing that I had been awarded one of the first COPE International Scholarships to attend the 2012 COPE European Seminar in London on March 16, 2012. The mail was further confirmed by an official letter from COPE Chair Elizabeth Wager. I was really feeling fortunate to receive this prestigious scholarship, which COPE offers to two journal editors from developing countries! Actually, I had already registered to attend this important meeting in London with or without the scholarship, and had even submitted my poster presentation, entitled “Conflict of interest: a serious issue on publication ethics for Indian medical journals”. But receiving this scholarship definitely boosted my confidence and gave me financial support to attend this meeting in London. Thanks to COPE for such a kind gesture!

This seminar was important to me for two reasons:

1. Editors of Indian medical journals are seldom exposed to ethical problems in publication, so we also rarely have the chance to consult specialized international bodies like COPE. It may be surprising to everybody that India does not have an active medical editor’s association, like WAME (the World Association of Medical Editors) or EMAME (the Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors). Although

there are several medical journals routinely published by various medical societies, universities, or professional bodies in India, unfortunately very few of them seriously handle issues of publication ethics. In my personal experience as an editor and editorial board member of various medical journals, I have noticed that Indian medical journals lack ethical vision in the handling of research publications.

2. Second, I was attracted by the theme of the seminar, “Correcting the Literature”. As publishers, editors or authors, we often are inadequate in our handling of retraction issues, copyright issues, or various legal issues pertaining to ethical publication of scientific information in medical journals. Hence I was sure that this seminar would improve my understanding and vision as the editor of a medical journal!

On March 16, 2012, I arrived early in the morning at Charles Darwin House Conference Centre, 12 Roger Street, London, and was introduced to Linda Gough, Liz Wager, Editor Jeannie Wurz and Vice Chair Sabine Kleinert of COPE. I am thankful to all of them—especially Linda—for their hospitality toward me in London.

A brilliant introduction to the conference by Liz Wager, followed by Andrew Sugden’s (*Science*) lucid discussion of retraction and misconduct, cleared many of my doubts as an Editor on issues of retraction policy in my journal.

The most important part of the seminar



was a series of group meetings during breakout sessions where we the editors from developing countries were allowed to discuss issues pertaining to publication ethics in our journals. I personally learned a lot about various complicated and tricky ethical issues in research publication. This information will benefit me as Editor of a medical journal from a developing country and also as an author of scientific contributions to a journal or as a peer reviewer of a medical journal.

Thanks to Liz Wager, Sabine Kleinert and new COPE Vice Chair Charlotte Haug for enlightening us on all the important aspects of ethical research! I really felt lucky to have the chance to interact with some of the world’s who’s who in research publication, like Caroline Barranco (*Nature Reviews*), Hannah Cumber (*The Lancet*) or Elizabeth Wager (COPE Chair). It was also a chance for me to interact with my neighboring colleagues such as Dr. Angel Magar (Nepal) or Dr. Fatema Jawad (Pakistan).

The COPE European Seminar 2012 was a memorable event in my life. I am seriously considering how I can share my experience and the knowledge I have gained from this seminar with my Indian colleagues. The very purpose of my journey to London and the faith which COPE has shown in me by providing a scholarship will be of no use if I fail to convey the spirit of COPE to my Indian colleagues and friends!

Kusal K. Das is Editor-in-Chief of the AI Ameen Journal of Medical Sciences and a Professor at AI Ameen Medical College, Karnataka, India. He can be reached at editormanage@alameenmedical.org.

The COPE North American Seminar will be held on October 18–19, 2012, at the Bechtel Conference Center, the home of the American Society of Civil Engineers, in Reston, Virginia, less than 10 miles from Dulles Airport, Washington, DC. The theme of the seminar will be the same as the recent European seminar: Correcting the Literature.

My experience at the European Seminar

by Angel Magar

The 2012 COPE European Seminar was one of the memorable events in my life, not because I got the scholarship but due to the opportunity to learn, interact, and meet with the people who have been working continuously to improve publication ethics. Ethics that deals with what is wrong and right, not legal and illegal—the science of morality. I believe morality depends entirely upon how we have been educated and brought up, and the circumstances. This seminar was full of education that has changed the way we work in our journal.

I was most fascinated by the retraction experience shared by Dr. Andrew Sugden of *Science* (see page 4), because these issues are totally different in developing countries like Nepal.

Scientific publication has also become mandatory for academic achievement in our region, and we encounter lots of research and publication misconduct while reviewing articles for possible publication. Most of the cases of retraction in our part of the world are due to duplicate publication. Research

publication has not gained momentum in terms of quality, and there are gaps at various levels.

Moreover, editors in our region are not formally trained in publication ethics, and thus I believe we have more publication misconduct than in the developed world, where authors, peer reviewers and editors are well educated. We are constantly looking for guidance in how to deal with misconduct, and COPE has become a tremendous source of support and reference materials.

The COPE European Seminar featured lectures by various eminent speakers, which were highly informative and useful, as well as group discussion of various case scenarios. I appreciated the opportunity to have a separate discussion with scholarship participants about improving local science.

The COPE scholarship should focus on those editors who will in turn educate their peers at a local level and spread the COPE guidelines, because I feel most of the misconduct is due to lack of education. I have committed



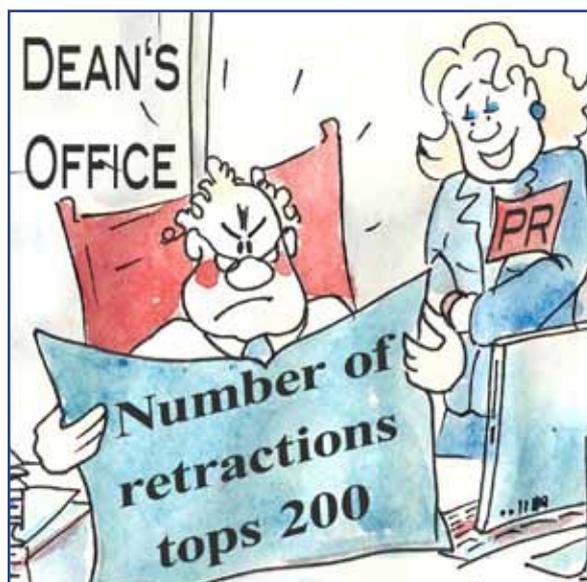
to organizing an international and national seminar on Publication Ethics particularly focusing on small journals.

In spite of financial hardship, I will try to attend more COPE seminars in the future to learn more and bring back ideas and the experience of the giants in this field. I wish all the best for the future scholarship holders, and urge those editors to apply who really want to make a difference at a local level. This scholarship provides an opportunity to interact and learn from scholars who have spent their lives working to improve publication ethics in the world.

Angel Magar is Executive Editor, Journal of Nepal Health Research Council, and Chief Editor, World Journal of Health Sciences. He can be reached at ang2el@gmail.com.

Last laugh

by Annemarie Glaser



"We could apply for a World Record, to give the story a positive spin."

THE LAST WORD(S)

Datebook

July 16, 2012—5th International Plagiarism Conference, Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom; <http://www.plagiarismadvice.org/>

August 14–15, 2012—International Society of Managing and Technical Editors, 2012 North American Conference, Washington, DC; www.ismte.org/2012_NA

August 31–September 3, 2012—Asia Pacific Association of Medical Journal Editors (APAME) Convention 2012, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; <http://ammje.org/apame2012/>

Words from the wise

"A man who has committed a mistake, and doesn't correct it, is committing another mistake."

Confucius