

# ethical editing

Theme: Ethics around the globe

## A small world

“It’s a small world!” is what you would say if you lived in New York and ran into your neighbor on the Great Wall in China. Ten years ago, you wouldn’t have expected to run into a COPE member outside of London. Things have changed. This past November, COPE sponsored seminars at three locations around the globe (see pages 5 to 9) and editors from Australia, Bosnia, Canada, China, Egypt, England, India, Iran, Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Scotland, and the US—to name a few—attended them. Ethics is no longer a local issue: it’s a global one.

Ethical problems are no longer confined to a single country, either. Recently, a paper written by a Chinese researcher who included his Dutch supervisor as a co-author was retracted by a peer-reviewed journal whose Editor in Chief is based in Portugal, and an article about the incident led a UK-based COPE Council member to refer to COPE’s retraction guidelines on a US-based website (see Retractions on page 4).

Clearly, if today’s problems are global, the solutions must be, as well. Editors are working together to address serious issues like fabrication (see page 4), and COPE is helping bring ethical information to an ever wider audience through its grants for researchers, translated flowcharts, and eLearning modules (see The Scoop from COPE). The COPE Council, now made up of members from four continents, represents more than 7000 COPE members around the world.

So don’t be surprised if you hear someone talking about ethics when you tour the Taj Mahal. The world may be getting smaller, but COPE is bigger and better than ever. See you soon!

*Jeannie*



The COPE Council and staff in December 2011 (l-r): Cindy Carter, Cynthia Clerk, Charlotte Haug, Chris Graf, Linda Gough, Steve Yentis, Ginny Barbour, Richard Green, Liz Wager, Natalie Ridgeway, Sabine Kleinert, Charley Miao, Irene Hames, André van Steirteghem, Margaret Rees, Lars Ole Sauerberg, Lance Small. Not pictured: Behrooz Astaneh, Geraldine Pearson, James Greenstone, Randell Stephenson, Riaz Agha, and Jeannie Wurz.



A small world

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## Two Council members re-elected

Two members of the COPE Council were re-elected to three-year terms that began on November 1, 2011. Randell Stephenson (below), Professor in Lithosphere Geophysics at the University of Aberdeen (Scotland), has been Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Geodynamics* since 2007.



Randell Stephenson

André van Steirteghem (right) is Editor-in-Chief of *Human Reproduction* and Professor Emeritus of the Brussels Free University (Belgium).



André van Steirteghem

## Opening for ombudsman

COPE is seeking applications for a new Ombudsman, to succeed Richard Green when his term expires in March 2012. Desired qualities are “insight into publication ethics and the work of COPE, and an understanding or experience of conducting investigations or arbitration.” The Ombudsman, who handles complaints against COPE and disagreements among COPE members, is expected to attend four COPE Council meetings a year in London, but is not a voting member of Council. Travel expenses will be paid by COPE. For further information contact Linda Gough ([cope\\_administrator@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_administrator@publicationethics.org)).



Richard Green

## International Advisory Board

Applications are welcome from members interested in serving on COPE's International Advisory Board. Members of the Advisory Board will act as points of contact for their country/region and will advise COPE Council in dealing with ethical concerns arising in their country/region. Board members will also act as ambassadors for COPE, promoting COPE's activities as well as identifying opportunities for COPE to work more closely on ethical issues in their areas. Board members should be willing to work on COPE projects, such as providing advice for official COPE documents and assisting with web projects such as eLearning, but are not expected to attend Council meetings and will primarily communicate by email or telephone. COPE members interested in serving as International Advisory Board members should send a short CV (no more than 4 pages) and letter of interest to [cope\\_opsmanager@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_opsmanager@publicationethics.org).

## Two scholarships for European seminar

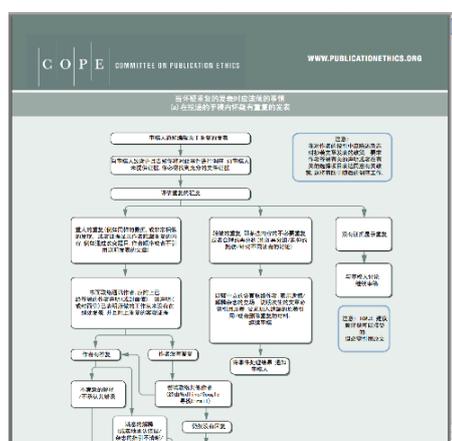
COPE member editors from developing countries are invited to apply for one of two scholarships to attend COPE's European seminar and annual general meeting, to be held in London on March 16th, 2012. This will cover two nights' hotel accommodation in London and round-trip (economy class) airfare. Interested editors should send a short CV and letter of application explaining why they would benefit from attending this meeting to [cope\\_administrator@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_administrator@publicationethics.org). The deadline for applications is Friday, January 13, 2012.

## eLearning released

After a momentous effort by COPE Operations Manager Natalie Ridgeway and Website Manager Cynthia Clerk, COPE's first four eLearning modules were released on October 20, 2011. The modules are available only to members, as a benefit of membership, but we encourage members to make all staff at their journal aware of this new resource. The first four topics are an introduction to publication ethics, plagiarism, falsification, and fabrication. Future modules will cover authorship, conflicts of interest, editor misconduct, reviewer misconduct, redundant publication, selective reporting, and unethical research. “This eLearning course aims to raise awareness in general and increase understanding, rather than tell you exactly what you must do, or how to handle a specific case,” says Liz Wager, COPE Chair. The modules can be accessed by members at [www.publicationethics.org/resources/elearning](http://www.publicationethics.org/resources/elearning).

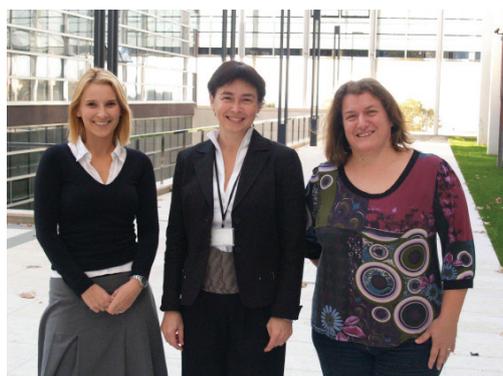
## Chinese flowcharts

Following the release of Spanish and Italian versions, Chinese versions of all 17 COPE flowcharts are now available at [www.publicationethics.org/resources/flowcharts](http://www.publicationethics.org/resources/flowcharts). Croatian, Japanese, Korean, Farsi (Persian), Turkish, Arabic, and Brazilian Portuguese translations have been made and will be available soon. In addition, COPE hopes to translate the Editor's Code of Conduct into Chinese.



COPE Chair Liz Wager (l) and Vice-Chair Sabine Kleinert (r), pictured here during a press conference, were keynote speakers at the 7th China Science Journal Development Forum in Chongqing, China, in October 2011. At the conference, organized by the China Association for Science and Technology, they gave talks on why editors need to be concerned about publication ethics and the role of editors in the responsible conduct and publication of research to an audience of around 500 journal editors.

## COPE-funded Croatian research published



Ana Marusic (middle), Lana Bosnjak (left), and Ana Jeroncic (right), of the University of Split School of Medicine in Split, Croatia, have published “A Systematic Review of Research on the Meaning, Ethics and Practices of Authorship across Scholarly Disciplines” in PLoS ONE. The goal of the study, which received a COPE grant in 2009 (see [www.publicationethics.org/resources/research](http://www.publicationethics.org/resources/research)), was “to evaluate evidence about authorship issues and provide a synthesis of research on authorship across research fields.”

In their systematic review, the authors reviewed 118

studies and identified “four general themes common to all research disciplines: authorship perceptions, definitions and practices; defining order of authors on the byline; ethical and unethical authorship practices; and authorship issues related to student/non-research personnel-supervisor collaboration.” Fifty-three percent of the studies included were surveys and 27% were descriptive studies, leading the authors to conclude that there is a lack of experimental research on authorship.

The authors also performed a meta-analysis of a subset of 14 studies reporting authors’ experience with or knowledge of misuse of authorship—the first such analysis of authorship problems. The meta-analysis found that 29% of authors reported being involved in or aware of authorship misuse. “The prevalence estimated in our meta-analysis indicates that authorship problems may have a greater impact on research than ‘classical’ misconduct activities of fabrication, falsification and plagiarism,” the authors concluded.

The 17-page article, which was e-published on September 8, 2011, is available at <http://tinyurl.com/3na6pbh>.

## Retractions

*The COPE Code of Conduct notes that editors should “always be willing to publish corrections, clarifications, retractions and apologies when needed”—but when, exactly, are retractions needed? Several recent examples show that there’s not always agreement on how standards should be interpreted, and that ignorance—and misconduct—can exist anywhere.*

### Rise in Retractions

According to the article “The Trouble with Retractions,” published by Richard van Noorden in *Nature* (October 6, 2011; Volume 478, pp. 26–28), the number of retracted articles listed in the Web of Science will increase from around 30 per year in the early 2000s to more than 400 in 2011. Retractions, he says, are “the official declaration that a paper is so flawed that it must be withdrawn from the literature.” Possibly the increase in the number of retractions is a result of increased awareness of misconduct, says the article, rather than an increase in misconduct itself. This may be due in part to the availability of plagiarism detection software, and the fact that more readers have access to published papers through the Internet. There is also increased recognition of inconsistencies in how editors address retractions. “Notices range from informative and transparent to deeply obscure,” van Noorden says.

### Retraction Watch

In August 2010 two medical journalists—Ivan Oransky and Adam Marcus—started a blog called Retraction Watch, in the hope that “highlighting retractions will give journalists more tools to uncover fraud and misuse of funds” and that this will lead to “larger discussions of the obligations of journals” (see <http://retractionwatch.wordpress.com/2010/08/03/why-write-a-blog-about-retractions/>). In October 2011, COPE Council member Irene Hames shared COPE’s retraction guidelines (<http://publicationethics.org/resources/guidelines>) in a post on Retraction Watch. In November 2011, Irene pointed COPE members to “some excellent slides from a talk

by Ivan Oransky—‘The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: What Retractions Tell Us About Scientific Transparency’—covering, amongst other things, the rise in retractions, reasons for retractions, lack of transparency in retraction notices, good retraction notices, using as examples cases investigated by Retraction Watch” (see <http://tinyurl.com/bqsymgo>).

### COPE research on retractions

COPE’s guidelines on retraction are based on research by Peter Williams and COPE Chair Elizabeth Wager, who received a COPE grant in January 2008. Their article “Exploring Why and How Journal Editors Retract Articles: Findings From a Qualitative Study” states that there is little consistency in policies and procedures used by journal editors in retracting articles. The research, resulting from a series of interviews with journal editors, was published online on July 15, 2011, in *Science and Engineering Ethics* (*Sci Eng Ethics*, DOI 10.1007/s11948-011-9292-0). And in “Coping with Scientific misconduct,” published in the *BMJ* (formerly the *British Medical Journal*) in 2011, Liz reports on cases discussed by the COPE Forum which showed “the difficulties editors may face when they try to alert institutions to possible cases of research or publication misconduct” (see <http://tinyurl.com/blh567t>).

### The Boldt retractions

Sometimes, sadly, retractions are due to serious ethical concerns which come to light as a result of extensive investigations. In March 2011, the Editors in Chief of 16 journals that publish anesthesia research—many of them COPE members—issued a joint statement in which they announced their

decision to retract 88 articles co-authored by German researcher Joachim Boldt (see any of the joint statements, e.g.: [www.springer.com/medicine/anesthesiology/journal/12630](http://www.springer.com/medicine/anesthesiology/journal/12630)). According to the statement: “The retraction of the articles in Table 1 for lack of IRB approval means that the research was unethical, and that IRB approval for the research was misrepresented in the published article. It does not mean that the research results per se are fraudulent.” An investigating committee was commissioned by the author’s institution, Klinikum Ludwigshafen, to “systematically assess the veracity of the findings presented in Dr. Boldt’s articles against patient and laboratory records.” An Editorial by COPE member Steven Shafer, Editor in Chief of *Anesthesia & Analgesia*, provides further details (see Shafer SL. Shadow of doubt. *Anesth Analg* 2011;112:498-500).

### The Stapel investigations

Meanwhile, in the field of social psychology, a preliminary report has been released claiming that some 30—and perhaps as many as 150—publications by Dutch researcher Diederik Stapel have been found to contain fabricated data. Stapel, who cooperated with the investigation, admitted to the fraud. Details appear in an article in *Nature* ([www.nature.com/news/2011/111101/full/479015a.html](http://www.nature.com/news/2011/111101/full/479015a.html)) and on the blog Retraction Watch (<http://tinyurl.com/cxy6tpn>).

### Retractions in London

Retractions will be the topic of COPE’s 2012 European Seminar, to be held in London on Friday, March 16, 2012. Stay tuned!

## SEMINAR SUMMARY

# 1st Asia Pacific Seminar in Melbourne

by Randell Stephenson

The 1st Asia Pacific Seminar and Forum, with the theme “Publication ethics at the four points of the journal editing compass”, took place on November 14 in Melbourne, where some 80 delegates enjoyed a bit of theater, a set of presentations with discussion, as well as posters and a break-out workshop based on COPE Forum cases. The event was hosted and moderated by Chris Graf (COPE Treasurer) and colleagues at the Wiley-Blackwell offices in historic Richmond. The bit of theater, a first for a COPE seminar anywhere, comprised a role-playing performance called “The Great Image Scandal”, conceived and written by Dr. Suzanne Morris, the Research Integrity Officer at the University of Queensland, Australia, with input and refinement by David Vaux of the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute in Melbourne.

The players included Neville Gibbs (actually: School of Medicine and Pharmacology of the University of Western Australia) playing the editor of a journal that is read by Randell Stephenson (School of Geosciences of the University of Aberdeen, UK,

and COPE Council member), playing a “whistle-blowing” scientist based in Melbourne who has noticed duplicate and manipulated images of blots in articles published in that journal by first author Suzanne Morris (University of Queensland), playing a post-doctoral fellow and “rising star” at a fictional Sydney institute competing with Randell’s fictional Melbourne institute; Richard O’Hair (School of Chemistry of the University of Melbourne), playing the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research at the fictional Sydney institute, a strong patron of the molecular research group there, having recruited Chris Graf (Wiley-Blackwell), playing the highly successful Head of the Centre for Molecule Discovery at the fictional Sydney Institute and last and corresponding author of the contested paper; and, standing, David Vaux, narrating and directing the story. This proved to be an entertaining yet highly instructive and insightful introduction to the subsequent lecture presentations and to one of the more insidious aspects of publishing ethics, and was expertly moderated by David Vaux.



Alfred Allan (Professor of Psychology at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Australia), seen above talking about “Publication ethics as a manifestation of professional ethics”, was the first of the four speakers in the presentation part of the program that followed The Great Image Scandal. The other speakers (and their topics), all players in The Great Image Scandal, were Neville Gibbs (“The range of conflicts of interest and how they should be managed”), Richard O’Hair (“Duplicate and salami publications in science”) and David Vaux (“Managing errors in the literature; whether inevitable, inadvertent, or intentional”), representing Social, Health, Physical and Life sciences, respectively.



Left to right: Gibbs, Stephenson, Morris, O’Hair, Graf, and Vaux



A novel aspect of the 1<sup>st</sup> Asia Pacific COPE Seminar was the inclusion of posters, which focused discussion during tea and lunch breaks. Above, Karen Woolley (ProScribe Medical Communications and the universities of Queensland and the Sunshine Coast) stands in front of her poster (co-authored with colleagues) on publication misconduct and plagiarism. The other posters (identifying the attending authors only) were “Trial registration and declaration of registration by authors

*[Asia Pacific seminar continued]*

of randomized controlled trials” (Angela Webster, Sydney School of Public Health, University of Sydney) and “Many clinical trials are not adequately registered: a survey of 200 trials” (Mark Elkins, University of Sydney), as well as two posters submitted by non-attending COPE authors: “Why and how do journals retract articles” (Liz Wager, COPE Chair, and Peter Williams, University College, London, UK) and “COPE support for nursing editors dealing with ethical dilemmas in publishing” (Geraldine Pearson, School of Medicine, University of Connecticut, USA).



Feedback from delegates suggested that the break-out session, in which smaller groups, as seen here, discussed real cases related to publication ethics issues submitted to COPE over the last few years and formulated how they would respond if faced with similar issues, was very successful. An hour of group discussion was followed by reports to the group as a whole, to close the day’s events. A final show of hands indicated a unanimous desire for a yearly COPE Seminar in the Asia-Pacific region.

Right: Attendees at the San Diego Forum discuss a case

## 3rd North American Seminar in San Diego

by Lance Small

COPE’s 3rd “North American Seminar” (formerly called the US seminar) was held at the University of California, San Diego, on November 1, 2011, preceded by a Forum on October 31. The meeting featured lively discussions, some student participation, and attendance ranging between 40 and 50 over the two days. This COPE meeting was the first on the west coast of the United States and also the first meeting in a university setting. The theme of the meeting was “Authorship”, continuing the practice of repeating the theme of the European Seminar held in the UK the previous March.

The three speakers were: Professor Lisa Bero of the University of California, San Francisco who spoke on “Ghosts, Guests, and other Distortions of Authorship in Medical and Scientific Journals”; Dave Kochalko of Thomson Reuters, who reported on the ORCID (Open Researcher & Contributor ID) project (see <http://orcid.org>), whose aim is the “disambiguation” of contributors to research initiatives; and Professor Robert Guralnick of the University of Southern California, the managing editor of the Transactions of the American Mathematical Society, who presented some of the ethical challenges facing mathematical publishing. Professor Bero discussed the efforts of the tobacco industry to “rebut” a Japanese study on the harmful effects of second-hand smoke. These efforts were organized by a law firm that also felt it was necessary to recruit a Japanese “author.” Recently,

Dr. Bero developed a “check-list” to aid in determining authorship and the order in which contributors appear in the list of authors.

Dave Kochalko spoke on the difficulty of “disambiguation”: the problem of the Smiths and the Zhangs, not to mention the problem of transliteration. For example, the same Chinese character may be transliterated differently depending on whether the author is from the North or the South of China. ORCID is an on-going project involving many organizations.

Professor Guralnick’s talk was more discursive, and emphasized how mathematics publication differs from, say, the bio-medical model. Authors are almost always listed alphabetically, for example. There is a movement toward electronic publication and, with the cooperation of some journals, early posting on the “ArXiv.” Professor Guralnick also touched on the current debate on open source publishing in mathematics, and wondered whether open source publication might lead to a deterioration of standards. He mentioned that he’d recently received an email from an open source “journal” informing him of an “October Special.” In disciplines like math, history, etc., securing funding for open source publication is a genuine problem, he said.

The university venue was a change for COPE. Most university faculty members are editors at some time

in their careers, and editing is considered “community service.” If “issues” arise, one seeks the advice of colleagues... a model actually not much different from that of COPE!



## 1st COPE Iranian Seminar in Shiraz

by Sarah Masoumi

“Publication ethics” was the theme of the first COPE-affiliated Iranian congress, held on November 24–25, 2011, in Shiraz, Iran. This congress was a joint collaboration between the Iranian Society of Medical Editors, which holds annual scientific seminars on medical publication, COPE, and Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, which is the leading university in the field of Medical Journalism in Iran. The congress was the first of its kind in the region, with more than 200 participants from different countries—among them Norway, Croatia, Egypt, Pakistan, Bosnia, the United Arab Emirates, and India—taking part in the event.

The congress officially began with a speech by the Chancellor of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, a welcome message by Dr Behrooz Astaneh, the head of the congress, and a greeting by the executive committee members, Ms Sarah Masoumi, Ms Zahra Barzin, and Mr Mehdi Rabiee. The congress featured 26 national and international presenters discussing different aspects of publication ethics, such as plagiarism, authorship, redundant publication, data fabrication, and image manipulation. Prof. Ana Marusic, Chair of the Department of Research in Biomedicine and Health at the University of Split, Croatia, and Dr. Charlotte Haug, a COPE Council member from Norway, were the guest speakers of the congress.

The congress was enriched by two video conferences from London and Oxford, UK, presented by Dr. Trish Groves, Deputy Editor of the BMJ and the chief editor of BMJ Open, and Prof. Douglas Altman, the director of the Center for Statistics in Medicine in Oxford and senior statistical editor of the BMJ, respectively.

On each of the two days a panel discussion further investigated

different aspects of ethical misconduct, with the congress participants asking questions regarding authorship disputes and plagiarism. Each day also featured an optional workshop: Dr. Behrooz Astaneh, a COPE council member, spoke on Internal Screening, and Prof. Ana Marusic spoke on Editorial Decisions and Communication with the Author.

Currently Iran has 212 English and Persian medical journals approved by the Ministry of Health. These journals had the opportunity to display their latest issues at the side exhibition held in the conference hall. This was a good opportunity for interested editors to browse the content and design of other national publications and to get some ideas on how to improve their journals.

The main aim in holding such a conference was to inspire regional editors to consider ethical issues more seriously and professionally. This is especially important because most national and regional editors do not have the opportunity to gather together and discuss their professional problems, and they most often are not provided with sufficient answers. Such conferences should be encouraged by national and international organizations in

order to increase knowledge and professionalism among regional journals. It is hoped that this congress will serve as the beginning for larger gatherings and projects to better incorporate ethical standards into the current body of medical publications. This could be achieved by the comprehensive training of regional editors through workshops, conferences, and short-term fellowships, as well as the Shiraz University of Medical Sciences Medical Journalism Master’s Course, which is the first university course on medical journalism in the region.

The congress finished on the afternoon of the second day with a concluding message by Dr. Behrooz Astaneh and the presenters received their certificates and were acknowledged individually with special souvenirs from Shiraz. The foreign delegates also visited the Medical Journalism Department and the office of the Iranian Journal of Medical Sciences (IJMS) at Shiraz University of Medical Sciences the following day.

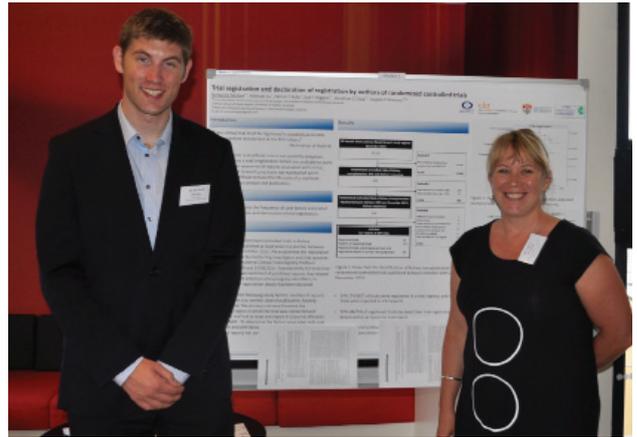
As a famous quote says: “Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, and working together is success.” Therefore, we hope that this congress was a successful beginning for future events.



## SEMINAR SUMMARY



Visit to the Medical Journalism Department,  
Shiraz University of Medical Sciences



Richard McGee and Angela Webster in Melbourne



Above: Day 1 panel discussion in Iran. Left to right: Prof Izet Masic, Bosnia; Dr Fatema Jawad, Pakistan; Dr Ahmed Said El Morsy, Egypt; Dr Roya Kelishadi, Iran; and Dr Charlotte Haug, Norway



Above: COPE Council members Ginny Barbour and Lance Small ready for attendees in San Diego.



Left: Polling the audience in Australia

## THE LAST WORD(S)



The tomb of Saadi, Shiraz, Iran

The invited guests and presenters of the Iranian congress also visited the well-known tombs of Hafez and Saadi—two of the great Persian poets of all time—followed by a tour around the city and dinner at one of the city's famous restaurants. This gave the guests the opportunity to exchange ideas and talk about future collaborations in a more informal environment.

## First call for conference

The next COPE Seminar will be the annual European Seminar on Friday, March 16, 2012.

The meeting will be held at a new venue in London—the Charles Darwin House—and will feature poster presentations for the first time. Registration will open in late December. Details will appear soon on the website ([www.publicationethics.org](http://www.publicationethics.org)).



In October 2011, COPE Chair Liz Wager spoke at the Global Conference on Ethics in Science and Technology, organized by the University of Santo Tomas in Manila, Philippines, to celebrate the university's 400th anniversary.

## Last laugh

by Annemarie Glaser



How COPE managed to be in so many places at once was a well-kept secret

## Words from the wise

بنی آدم اعضای یک پیکرند  
که در آفرینش ز یک گوهرند

چو عضوی به درد آورد روزگار  
دگر عضوها را نماند قرار

تو کز محنت دیگران بی غمی  
نشاید که نامت نهند آدمی

Persian poet Saadi, 1184 CE to 1283 CE

Human beings are members of a whole,  
In creation of one essence and soul.  
If one member is afflicted with pain,  
Other members uneasy will remain.  
If you've no sympathy for human pain,  
The name of human you cannot retain!

English translation by M. Aryanpoor