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

Contact author to explain concerns but do not make direct accusation

Author replies

Unsatisfactory answer/ admits guilt

Satisfactory explanation

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

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

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

Author cleared

Reject

Inform reviewer of outcome

Author found guilty

Apologise to author, proceed with peer-review if appropriate

No or unsatisfactory response

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

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

Author cleared

Reject

Inform reviewer of outcome

Author found guilty

Apologise to author, proceed with peer-review if appropriate