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

Review by 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

Issue resolved satisfactory

Inform reviewer about outcome of case

Unsatisfactory answer/no response

Inform author that review process is suspended until case is resolved

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

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, UKPPI, ORI)

Consider submitting case to COPE if it raises novel ethical issues

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

Developed for COPE by Liz Wager of Sideview (www.lizwager.com) © 2013 Committee on Publication Ethics First published 2006

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