COPE and Publication Ethics

#intropubethics

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Disclosure: CG works for Wiley and benefits from the company’s commercial success. CG receives no form of compensation from COPE for his voluntary role with COPE.
“Much of the scientific literature, perhaps half, may simply be untrue.”


Symposium on Reproducibility and reliability of biomedical research at the Academy of Medical Sciences, April 2015
http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0068397
About COPE

COPE began in 1997

– Informal forum
– A small group of editors
– Discuss ethical issues relating to biomedical research and publication

COPE in 2016

– 10,000+ members in 103 countries (Algeria to Zimbabwe)
– International and fully inclusive
About COPE

General members
  – Journal editors, publishers, associate members

Constitutional members
  – Council members elected by general members to 3-year terms
  – Trustee Board: officers/committee chairs, elected by Council members
COPE provides Leadership, Voice, and Resources.
COPE resources and services

- A neutral place (Forum) to discuss
- A website of freely available resources
- Database of cases
- Flowcharts
- Guidance/discussion documents
- Sample letters
- Codes of Conduct
- Best Practice guidelines
What are the big issues?
Prevalence of problems

= Consistent major topics
  Authorship and plagiarism

↓ High but decreasing
  Questionable/unethical research and redundant/duplicate publication

↑ New and increasing
  Conflict of interest and peer review
Continuum of issues

Unintentional

Intentional

Error → Fraud

Continuum of issues

Unintentional

Intentional

Inadequate records

Error → Fraud

Inadequate record-keeping

“We have been using the same database... our new results were implausible... I found we had failed to load 8 files into the dataset.
Continuum of issues

Unintentional

Intentional

Error → Fraud

Data fabrication

Fraud

Fabrication

Hwang Woo-suk

Picture from http://s1.lemde.fr/image/2005/11/18/600x315/711878_3_0fe1_hwang-woo-suk-star-mondiale-du-clonage-humain.jpg
How are errors detected?

Misconduct/errors can be detected
  – By editor
  – By software
  – By reviewers
  – By post-publication review (readers)
  – AND the authors themselves
Peer review problems

Relatively recently discovered (2011)

Peer review scams and cartels (2014)

Fake email addresses and electronic submissions facilitated this activity

• Resulted in mass retractions by publishers in 2015
The manipulations may have been conducted by agencies offering language-editing and submission assistance.

Elizabeth Moylan, Inappropriate manipulation of peer review http://blogs.biomedcentral.com/bmcblog/2015/03/26/manipulation-peer-review/
What help can you get?
Resources

From our Code of Conduct and our Guidelines to useful sample letters and flowcharts, COPE offers a range of useful tools for journal editors and writers.

**Code of Conduct**

Through the Code of Conduct, COPE aims to define best practice in the ethics of scholarly publishing and to assist editors, editorial board members, owners of journals and publishers to achieve this.

[View Code]

**Flowcharts**

Flowcharts are designed to help editors follow COPE's Code of Conduct and implement its advice when faced with cases of suspected misconduct.

[View Flowcharts]

**Guidelines**

Access COPE's official guidance, including the Retraction Guidelines.

[View Guidelines]

**eLearning**

COPE's eLearning course is designed to give editors a deeper understanding about publication ethics and practical guidance about how to detect, prevent and handle misconduct.

[View eLearning]

**International standards for editors and authors**

Position statements setting out international standards for responsible research publication for editors and authors.

**Discussion Documents**

Discussion documents aim to stimulate discussion and debate within the academic publishing community.
Peer review in all its forms plays an important role in ensuring the integrity of the scholarly record. The process depends to a large extent on trust, and requires that everyone involved behaves responsibly and ethically. Peer reviewers play a central and critical part in the peer-review process, but too often come to the role without any guidance and may be unaware of their ethical obligations. The COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers set out the basic principles and standards to which all peer reviewers should adhere during the peer-review process. It is hoped they will provide helpful guidance to researchers, be a reference for journals and editors in guiding their reviewers, and act as an educational resource for institutions in training their students and researchers.

**Basic principles to which peer reviewers should adhere**

Peer reviewers should:

- only agree to review manuscripts for which they have the subject expertise required to carry out a proper assessment and which they can assess in a timely manner

- respect the confidentiality of peer review and not reveal any details of a manuscript or its review, during or after the peer-review process, beyond those that are released by the journal
COPE’s 18 Flowcharts (in 6 languages)

- How to respond to whistle blowers
- What to do if you suspect a reviewer has appropriated an author’s idea or data
- What to do if you suspect plagiarism
- What to do if you suspect redundant (duplicate) publication
- Changes in Authorship
- Conflict of Interest
- What to do if you suspect an ethical problem
- What to do if you suspect fabricated data

Guides for a logical process of investigation and decision making
COPE’s 18 Flowcharts (in 6 languages)

What to do if you suspect fabricated data

(b) Suspected fabricated data in a published manuscript

- Reader expresses suspicion of fabricated data
- Thank reader and state your plans to investigate
- Consider getting a 2nd opinion from another reviewer
- Contact author to explain your concerns but do not make direct accusations

Author replies
- No response
  - Attempt to contact all other authors (check Medline/Google for emails)
COPE's 18 flowcharts (in 6 languages)

Author replies

Unsatisfactory answer/admits guilt

Inform all authors you intend to contact institution/regulatory body

Contact author's institution requesting an investigation

Satisfactory explanation

Apologise to author
Publish correction if necessary (e.g. if an honest error has been detected)
Inform reader of outcome

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

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

No or unsatisfactory response

Author(s) guilty of fabrication

Publish retraction

Author(s) found not guilty

Apologise to author(s)

Publish expression of concern

Inform reader of outcome
COPE Retraction Guidelines

Purpose of retractions
• They are not punishment for misconduct
• Must not be defamatory or libelous
• Clearly and rationally correct the literature
• Insure integrity of scientific record
• Alert readers to redundant publication

COPE Retraction Guidelines

Retractions should

- Identify article and link to it
  - 32% of retracted articles are not noted as retracted in any way
- Be clearly identified as retraction
- Original article should remain available but marked in some way
- Be published promptly

Retractions should
• Be freely available (no paywall)
• State the reasons for retraction
• Avoid defamatory statements
• State who is retracting (author, editor)

Yes, there are challenges
Scientists feel pressure to compromise on research integrity

Yes, there is progress
Issues, from the Reproducibility Symposium

- Data dredging
- Omitting null results
- Underpowered study
- Errors
- Underspecified methods
- Weak experimental design

Symposium on Reproducibility and reliability of biomedical research at the Academy of Medical Sciences  
http://www.acmedsci.ac.uk/download.php?f=file&i=32577
Strategies, from the Reproducibility Symposium

**Open data**
Openly sharing results and the underlying data with other scientists.

**Pre-registration**
Publicly registering the protocol before a study is conducted.

**Collaboration**
Working with other research groups, both formally and informally.
Automation
Finding technological ways of standardising practices, thereby reducing the opportunity for human error.

Open methods
Publicly publishing the detail of a study protocol.

Post-publication review
Continuing discussion of a study in a public forum after it has been published (most are reviewed before publication).

Reporting guidelines
Guidelines and checklists that help researchers meet certain criteria when publishing studies.

Symposium on Reproducibility and reliability of biomedical research at the Academy of Medical Sciences http://www.acmedsci.ac.uk/download.php?f=file&i=32577
“Our replication standards contribute directly to a more rigorous, rational, theory-driven, and cumulative approach.”

William Jacoby, “Replication” at American Journal of Political Science
http://exchanges.wiley.com/authors/videos-and-webinars_654.html
We need multiple strategies

Accept there is a problem and that addressing it requires time, money, people, different thinking

• Improve detection
• Education and support
• Tackle the root causes
“We need a culture of responsibility for the integrity of the literature... it’s not just the job of editors.”

Ginny Barbour, COPE Chair, Tokyo, Japan, 2015
Thanks

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