COPE

The past – present – and future

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Senior Executive Editor The Lancet

Thorax Associate Editors’ meeting

London, November 2007

www.publicationethics.org.uk
Why does publication ethics matter?

Published research influences other researchers and changes practice!

Journal reputation

Editors as guardians of the research record
Editors’ role in fostering research integrity
Why does research integrity matter?

Public trust in research

67 retractions in MEDLINE in 2005
97, in 2006

What is worse..... many continue to be cited (or included in systematic reviews) after retraction
What is journals’ and editors’ role in:

- Being part of the problem
- Detecting misconduct
- Reacting to misconduct
- Preventing misconduct
- Fostering integrity

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• What is happening to research integrity (pressure to publish)?

• Was there anything journals/editors could have done to prevent publication in recent high-profile cases?

• Should editors have more stringent rules and be less trusting?

• Would it actually help?
Committee on Publication Ethics

Research misconduct - definitions

- Fabrication of data or cases
- Wilful distortion of data (Falsification)
- Plagiarism
- No ethics approval
- Not admitting missing data
- Ignoring outliers
- No data on side effects
- Gift authorship
- Redundant publication
- Inadequate literature search

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COPE - the past

- started in 1997 as “self-help” group of editors (Richard Smith, Richard, Horton, Mike Farthing)
- 4 meetings a year
- anonymous discussion of suspected misconduct cases
- advice to editors on how to proceed
- cases (and outcomes if available) documented in annual printed reports
- Guidelines on Good Publication Practice
- annual conferences
Summary of COPE cases
1997-2006
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No of cases</th>
<th>“Evidence of misconduct”</th>
<th>“Probably no misconduct”</th>
<th>Not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997-2000</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>285</strong></td>
<td><strong>219</strong></td>
<td><strong>45</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Problems/dilemmas discussed (n=285)*

- Duplicate/redundant publication: 77
- No ethics approval: 34
- Authorship issues: 31
- No or inadequate informed consent: 30
- Falsification or fabrication: 28
- Plagiarism: 26
- Unethical research or clinical malpractice: 19
- Undeclared conflict of interest: 15
- Reviewer misconduct: 8
- Editorial misconduct: 6
- (miscellaneous: 41)

*More than one possible
Of 285 cases, 172 (60%) pre-publication
95 (33%) post-publication
Common difficulties for editors

- Time consuming!
- No reply from authors
- No reply from head of institutions
- Inadequate investigation by institution
- No institution
- Managing/analysing raw data
- What to do, if alleged misconduct is unproven?
COPE – the present

since 2001 elected Chair, Vice-Chair, Treasurer, Secretary (added in 2007), and other Council members (currently 12 members, 3 vacancies, advertised with deadline of Dec 3)
COPE members  (August 2007)

282 members (with over 300 journals signed up) from 29 countries:

Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, India, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Romania, Serbia, Singapore, Sweden, the Netherlands, Turkey, UK, USA, and Venezuela
Committee on Publication Ethics

- Chair: Harvey Marcovitch
- Vice-Chair: Sabine Kleinert
- Treasurer: Jeremy Theobald
- Secretary: Liz Wager
- Ombudsman: Richard Green
- Council: Tim Albert, Virginia Barbour, Trish Groves, Peter Hall, Charlotte Haug, Margaret Rees, Steve Yentis, Pritpal Tamber
- Administration: Linda Gough

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COPE – the present

• 2005: Code of Conduct for editors – developed after wide consultation as minimum standard COPE members should adhere to

“The code sets out standards of good editorial conduct. It also calls on editors to take seriously their role as guardians of biomedical science by taking all reasonable steps to ensure that allegations of research misconduct are properly investigated”.

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COPE – the present

• 2006/7: Development of flowcharts for common problems

• Currently 14 flowcharts with more in development:
  – Redundant publication (in submitted or published paper)
  – Plagiarism (in submitted or published paper)
  – Fabricated data (in submitted or published paper)
  – Changes in authorship (addition or removal of author before or after publication)
  – Undisclosed conflict of interest (in submitted or published paper)
  – Ethical problem in submitted paper
  – How COPE handles complaints against editors
COPE flowcharts as practical guides for editors
COPE flowcharts as practical guides for editors

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RAISING THE QUALITY OF BIOMEDICAL JOURNALS — COPE

Organization of journal editors concerned about dealing with possible breaches in research and publication ethics. Includes guidelines on good practice, ...

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COPE Ltd operates a range of very successful social enterprises in the Shetland Islands, and offers consultancy services to existing and prospective social ...

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www.cope.ltd.uk/ - 10k - Cached - Similar pages
COPE – the present

- Two rounds of research grants per year (up to £5000 each) – deadline Dec 1 and June 1

“to fund research in the field of publication ethics”

At least one of the applicants must be a COPE member
COPE - the present

• Links with:
  – UK Panel of Research Integrity
  – CSE
  – WAME
COPE - the present

Co-sponsor and planning of first World Conference On Research Integrity, Lisbon, September 2007

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COPE - the present

Raising the quality of Biomedical Journals

By doing so, indirectly fostering research integrity
Case examples

- Case 1: Plagiarism in foreign-language journal (+authorship issues)
- Case 2: “data too good to be true”
Committee on Publication Ethics

Case 1: plagiarism in foreign language

Management of acute optic neuritis

S J Hickman, C M Dalton, D H Miller, T Plant

Optic neuritis is a common condition that causes reversible loss of vision. It can be clinically isolated or can arise as one of the manifestations of multiple sclerosis. Occasional cases are due to other causes, and in these instances management can differ radically. The treatment of optic neuritis has been investigated in several trials, the results of which have shown that corticosteroids speed up the recovery of vision without affecting the final visual outcome. Other aspects of management, however, are controversial, and there is uncertainty about when to investigate and when to treat the condition. Here we review the diagnostic features of optic neuritis, its differential diagnosis, and give practical guidance about management of patients. The condition’s association with multiple sclerosis will be considered in the light of studies that define the risk for development of multiple sclerosis and with respect to results of trials of disease-modifying drugs in these individuals.

Optic neuritis is common, having an incidence of 1-5 per 100,000 per year. The incidence is higher in Caucasians in countries at high latitudes, and in spring. Individuals aged 20-49 years are most at risk, with women more often affected than men. The condition usually presents as subacute unilateral loss of vision, although loss of vision in both eyes can occur, either simultaneously or sequentially. More instances of optic neuritis are due to idiopathic inflammatory demyelination, which can arise in isolation, or as a manifestation of multiple sclerosis. Despite some major studies there are still many controversial areas in the management of optic neuritis, with differences of opinion expressed in surveys done to investigate the way the condition is managed. In this Review, we discuss the diagnosis and management of optic neuritis.
Case 1:

- Paper retracted
- Difficulties:
  - A number of authors very senior respected Norwegian researchers
  - Some on IAB of Norwegian Medical Journal
  - Some clearly not very familiar with content of paper (?authorship)
Case 2 (Lancet case)

• Paper describes exciting new technique with very good results

• 2 of 3 reviewers say “too good to be true’, one contacts manufacturer – confirmation results impossible
Case 2 (Lancet case)

- Corresponding author (=supervisor of postdoc) challenged and paper rejected (pointing out discussed at COPE also).
- Corresponding author instigates institutional investigation: outcome – postdoc omitted, possibly fabricated data (but now at a different institution)
- Supervisor undergoes retraining on how to supervise
Adding COPE into the equation, makes negotiations easier for editors and adds the weight of an international outside body!!
Fostering research integrity
What can editors do?

• COPE – pursue misconduct, adhere to good publication standards
  COPE support for editors might facilitate response from authors/institutions

• Heightened vigilance, especially high-risk papers (public impact, collaborations, unexpected results, commercial interest, reviewers’ suspicion)
What should editors do? (Science investigation)

- Risk stratify papers
- Clarify contributions/responsibilities of authors
- Make primary data available to reviewers/readers
- Act in concert with other “high-profile journals”
What can editors do?

• Insist on prospective trial registration

• Check protocol with submission
What can editors do?

• Ensure adherence to best reporting standards (CONSORT, STARD, STROBE........etc) – oddities may be more apparent
What can editors do?

• Screening for:
  – Plagiarism (CrossCheck or similar)
  – Figure manipulation (J Cell Biol)

BUT: time-consuming and not fool-proof
Figure manipulation

What can editors do?

• Declared transparent policies on conflict of interest and role of sponsor (prior to peer review)

• Ask questions at submission stage (authors’ contributions, involvement of medical writer…etc)
What can editors do?

• Demand independent data monitoring for all studies

• Emphasise responsibility of ALL authors for data integrity!!
COPE – the future

- Will become a charity (?end of 2007)
- Best practice guidelines (2007/8)
- Strengthen role in education (2008)
  - Distance-learning for editors
  - Workshops for editors
  - Offer to audit journals
- Improved website (2008)
  - Publication ethics blog, wiki
  - Letter templates for editors
  - Quarterly Bulletin/newsletter for members
- PR strategy
COPE – the future

• Further link with UK-PRI and UK research funders (Research Councils) – conference April 2008
• Work with CrossCheck and publishers to test/evaluate plagiarism screening tool
• COPE/Nature initiative: role of co-authors
• COPE/ALPSP Seminar on Responsible Publication Practices: October 2008
COPE - the future

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