

COPE European Seminar 2013

Report from Pakistan

I had first attended the annual seminar on publication ethics in 2012, and when the call for papers came earlier this year, I looked forward to attending it and meeting old colleagues.

The theme for the 2013 event was also quite pertinent, “Publication ethics from student to professional”, and is something as a journal editor I run into every week. If it is not a young medical professional dropping by our office to ask about authorship rights, it is a reviewer complaining about unethical behaviour by renowned names in the field. Hence, Turnitin’s Academic Advisor Gill Rowell’s observation that “writing ethics should be taught from childhood” is not far from the truth.

The increasing popularity of the COPE European seminar was visible in the larger number of professionals who had come to participate.

The day had begun with a breakfast session on scanning for plagiarism, followed by a lecture by Professor Pieter Drenth from Amsterdam on institutional responses to violation of research integrity. The last generated a lot of debate.

Dr Irene Hames, COPE council member, introduced the new ethical guidelines for peer reviewing by COPE, which had been published the same day. The instructions are very important and should be adopted by every journal to protect any unethical practices. Not all reviewers are well trained, and often authors provide fake names for reviews which may give a conflict of interest. An important message was that editors should not review articles from their own journals. An important message was that editors should be open and transparent when they review a paper in their own journal. Given the low quality of peer reviews in our country, my colleagues at *JPMA* agree, and feel that often editors can be the balance in maintaining quality.

Student plagiarism was addressed by Gill Rowell, providing interesting figures of a decrease in the incidence after the introduction of the new instructions. She ended her talk with an impressive message for all that “honest writing skills should be taught in the formative years of childhood”.

The afternoon session brought interesting cases related to peer reviewer’s wrong behaviour, recycling reviews and authorship problems. These were discussed in detail and solutions were offered.

It was also encouraging to have *JPMA*’s poster displayed in this seminar, and it was discussed and appreciated by many colleagues.

At the end of the day, the symposium and workshop is a very fruitful annual event that provides an opportunity for journal editors to get together, get acquainted with the latest guidelines on

writing and publication ethics, and discuss the various problems encountered in their respective countries.

After two years, I believe that human nature is the same everywhere and hence the problems related to ethics are very similar all over the world. As journal editors, our job is to be well versed with the rules and how to deal with them emphatically.

Editors have a difficult role to play but with my personal experience, I can say that I have had a tremendous amount of support and help from the COPE council members in solving my problems. The Forum is an excellent opportunity to present cases and gain the support to take a correct decision.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to COPE for providing me with the scholarship to attend the seminar this year. This made it possible to participate in this important event and take back the latest knowledge to my colleagues back home.

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