



**PUBLICATION  
INTEGRITY WEEK**  
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# Alignment of a Medical Society and a Journal to Address Academic Misconduct

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## Background

- **Research Integrity is Paramount: Accuracy in science, Public trust, Patient care**
- **Large increase in the number of research allegations regarding published articles, and allegations are now far more visible.**
  - **Some web sties estimate 5,500 papers retracted in 2022 vs 119 in 2002**
- **Due to the volume of allegations processes are being re-considered.**
  - **Often the prevue of editor in Chief**
  - **Processes need to be efficient, transparent, and fair.**

## Evolution of Processes

- **Become evident that processes in place within Journals:**
  - Needed to be refreshed
  - Easily overwhelmed due to lack of recourses and time
  - Editors felt isolated and often ill-equipped to assess allegations
- **Momentum to address the issue**
  - Appearance that time to decision was very slow
  - Editors were reluctant to take action, including retraction
    - Reflection on journal
    - Reflection on their work (or that of previous editors)

## Evolution of Processes

- **Each Journals guidelines needed to be examined**
  - Allegations have become more complex
  - New technology has been used (images, repeated numbers)
  - Allegations have become more public and instantaneous
    - **Reputations have been challenged publicly**
  - Often research is not under the preview of one “institution”
    - **Research is multi-center, multi-national and investigators move**
- **Allegation are not proof of misconduct**
  - **Careers can be damaged**

## Evolution of Processes

- Some Journals, like *Fertility and Sterility*, are associated with a medical society **The American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM)**
  - Allegations can affect the reputation of a medical society
  - Action (or inaction) reflect on a medical society
    - Reputational risk
    - Legal risk
  - The society has a family of journals (need to harmonize)

# The Approach of Fertility and Sterility and **ASRM**

- **Recognized the need for:**
  - Expanded expertise
    - Enhance the rigor of review of allegation
  - Harmonization of processes to ensure fairness
  - Give the EIC some cover
  - Need for consensus building
    - Minimizing the power (or inaction) of one person
  - Decrease the time to address allegation
  - Standardize portal of entry and acknowledgment of receipt (and list of action)
  - Address complex issue of collaborative research
    - Research is multi-center, multi-national and investigators change affiliations

# The Approach of Fertility and Sterility and **ASRM**

- **Formation of *Research Integrity Committee***
  - Committee consists of 6 – 10 members (started 12/22)
    - Chair (co-chairs)
    - Biostatisticians
    - Study methodologists
    - Clinical expertise
    - Legal and ethics considerations
    - As hoc member appointed by publisher
    - EIC is ad hoc to the committee
    - Direct Administrative support
  - Regular meetings

## **ASRM** Research Integrity Committee

- Formed January 2023
- Received more than 25 allegations
  - Implausible enrollment/dropout/retention
  - Discrepancy between abstract or trial registration and published paper
  - Methodological or data reporting error
  - Repeating numbers within or among papers
  - Misrepresentation of data in conclusions
  - Duplicate publication or plagiarism
- 10 retractions
- 2 statement of concern
- 2 errata
- 3 cases declined to investigate
- Many still pending



# ASRM Research Integrity Committee

- **Lessons learned**

- Difficult in finding volunteers with expertise
- Training committee members to understand guidelines (COPE)
- Objective allegations regarding data are easier (incorrect data, plagiarism, timelines)
- Subjective allegations are challenging
  - Repetitive numbers within or in multiple manuscripts
  - Claims of feasibility
- Level of evidence needed to “take action” is subjective
- “Impact” of deliberations when data “is not” available
- How to resolve disagreements (within and external to the committee)

# ASRM Research Integrity Committee

- **Points of discussion**
  - **Is there a statute of limitation for review?**
    - **When do we expect that data should be available?**
      - **When was the expectation of a change to digital data?**
      - **Do not feel it is a privacy issue (or HIPPA)**
    - **We request other proof of study (consent, IRB, logs, clinic records)**
  - **How much time is allotted for response after contacting investigators or institution?**
    - **Do we contact co-investigators?**
    - **Institutions do not always cooperate**
  - **Does decision need to be unanimous?**
  - **Are meeting abstracts reviewed?**

# ASRM Research Integrity Committee

- **Moving forward and unresolved issues**
  - **Steps are in place to reduce research misconduct at submission stage:**
    - **Request data, attestations, methods review**
    - **Number of RCTS has diminished**
  - **Refresh COPE guidelines**
    - **Timelines, involvement of institution, clarity regarding spectrum of action**
  - **What are the consequences of suspecting misconduct at submission?**
    - **How can journals share information to minimize submission elsewhere**
  - **What is the optimal use of a Statement of Concern**
    - **At allegation? Creditable allegation? As an outcome?**
  - **Correct balance of objectively, due process, confidentiality, efficiency**

# ASRM Research Integrity Committee

- **Moving forward and unresolved issues**
  - Understand why “your” journal may be susceptible to accepting papers with misconduct
  - Better education regarding ethics of publication globally
    - serial publication, last minute change in data or authorship
  - Disclosure of monetary incentive for publication
  - What is the role of the publisher?
  - Greater resources are need to address the problem (whose resources?)
  - Need modern techniques to keep pace with technology
    - AI, translation, images
- **This is a large undertaking, but scientific integrity is paramount!**

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**THANK YOU**

[publicationethics.org](https://publicationethics.org)