

Editorial

A message to our readers, authors and reviewers
regarding publication ethics

The occurrence of scientific fraud is well documented [1], and may involve such acts as falsification or fabrication of data, plagiarism and parallel submission. In the worst case, this involves abandonment of scientific ethical principles for personal gain. Furthermore, the guide for authors for the *Journal of Chromatography B* states: “Submission of an article implies that the work described has not been published previously (except in the form of an abstract or as part of a published lecture or academic thesis), that it is not under consideration for publication elsewhere, that its publication is approved by all authors and tacitly or explicitly by the responsible authorities where the work was carried out, and that, if accepted, it will not be published elsewhere in the same form, in English or in any other language, without the written consent of the Publisher.

Plagiarism can be generally defined as the taking of someone else’s ideas or work and passing them off as one’s own, a sort of intellectual theft. Plagiarism may involve copying text, figures or data directly or changing a few words in a passage from another source without sufficient citation, along with the use of appropriate quotation marks. In scientific publishing, this can be extended to analysis or other use of someone else’s data or results without sufficient citation. Other cases of scientific fraud may involve complete fabrication of data. Although the use of previously published text by the same author may be considered less offensive, because it does not constitute theft of someone else’s work, it is without appropriate citation and permission, a violation of the copyright of the original publication. These types of problems can occur unintentionally through a lack of thorough review on the part of all authors of a manuscript. It is therefore critically important for all authors of a manuscript to ensure that publication fraud has not occurred and that the originality of all work can be independently verified with source documentation.

A particularly blatant violation of scientific ethical conduct involving plagiarism of a figure and falsifica-

tion of data was recently brought to our attention by one of our readers. This paper can be accessed at [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S1570-0232\(02\)00759-6](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S1570-0232(02)00759-6). We were asked to compare Fig. 2 of *J. Chromatogr. B* 784 (2003) 195–201 by N. Erk with Fig. 5 in a previous and unrelated publication by different authors (*J. Chromatogr. B* 758 (2001) 183–188). Close inspection reveals that the figures showing pharmacokinetic data are identical, and such similarity of pharmacokinetic behavior, especially for different drugs and a different set of patients as presented in these two figures would be highly unlikely. Doubts as to the validity of the results depicted in Fig. 2 of the later paper were therefore raised. Considering the seriousness of the charge, the editors of the journal deemed it appropriate to provide an opportunity for the sole author of the paper in question to provide raw data as evidence that the results were valid. This opportunity was not taken advantage of by the author, who categorically denied any charge of scientific fraud. Doubts about the validity of the paper could not therefore be alleviated due to a lack of cooperation on the part of the author.

Upon submission, the Editors and reviewers treated this paper like any other submission assuming that the paper was in conformance with common ethical standards. On this assumption the paper was accepted for publication, but based on the identical nature of the two figures, careful assessment of other irregularities associated with the article and the inability of the author to provide an explanation, the Editors of *J. Chromatogr. B* no longer consider the work to be original or correct and have reported the incident to the author’s home institution. Should this author submit manuscripts to *J. Chromatogr. B* in the future, these submissions will be handled with a very high degree of scrutiny.

Details of this case are presented as an example of the serious consequences associated with publication fraud and it is our hope that this will discourage further such occurrences.

Reference

[1] L.D. Claxton, *Mutat. Res.* 589 (2005) 17.

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