

## Editorial—Some original creations

Up until now, the *Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology* has published research papers classified as either 'Original Papers' or 'Communications'. The classification of 'Communication' was to encourage short reports of immediate interest and which could be given priority for rapid publication, and not that their content would not be considered original. Over the years, the distinctions between the two types of paper have become blurred to the extent that the only difference was the length; even then those papers classed as Communications could sometimes be as long as the so-called Original Papers. There may have been several reasons for the lengthening of Communications including amplifications requested by the referees for a paper originally submitted as a Communication, or the request by an author for his paper to be considered as a Communication, despite its length, in the belief that this would expedite publication.

Because of this blurring of the margins, and because there seems no justification in a classification system which apparently admits to Unoriginal Papers, the *Journal* will in future make no distinction. All papers which have been judged to be of acceptable standard by the usual peer-review system will appear as full papers, regardless of length. The *Journal* will, however, continue to publish comment on current pharmaceutical sciences in the form of Letters to the Editor, which will in all cases be published soon after acceptance by the Editor.

It is the theme of Original Papers which I wish to address in this Editorial. Naturally, we expect that scientific research reported in a learned journal will be the original work of the authors, whether we use this definition to exclude work repeating results already in the literature (not new), or to ensure that the author has not merely copied someone else's work (plagiarism).

The first of these is one of the facets of new submissions that Referees and Editors will generally consider in deciding on the acceptability of a paper, and may be easy to decide, particularly if the right referee is chosen. Authors may be disappointed by rejections of work they may well have submitted in good faith, but no-one's integrity is impugned—unless of course there is a personal vendetta between Author and Referee that the Editor is unaware of. Plagiarism—which comes under some definitions of scientific fraud—is less easily detected, most referees and all Editors being so naturally trusting of their fellow scientists that the thought does not cross their minds. Even less likely to cross their minds is that other extreme definition of Original Papers—papers so original that everything in them comes from the authors' own imagination, without the tedium of actually carrying out the experiments. There may be gradations in this sort of scientific fraud; for example, the experiments may have been done, but the author preferred to report the results he expected rather than the results he obtained, or the results were selectively reported to reinforce preconceived ideas. In the case of

straightforward plagiarism, the scientific truth may not be compromised and the literature may not be faulty; only someone's ego is damaged, or someone receives undeserved credit. It is debatable whether this should be regarded as scientific fraud in the strict sense.

Invented results however are more damaging, more so as they will remain in the literature even when they have been retracted. Indeed, there may even be cases where there are overwhelming indications that the claimed results could not have been achieved, but no evidence that they were not. In these cases, a retraction by the journal concerned may not be possible where the author himself remains adamant of the integrity of the reports. A recent article in the *Journal of Laboratory and Clinical Medicine* (J. Lab. Clin. Med. 123: 795–799) illustrates and tackles this problem. The case concerned a series of papers on antioxidant strategies in the treatment of intestinal disorders. After receiving concerns on two papers published by that journal, the editors made extensive investigations, including obtaining statements from the sole author, Dr Aws S. Salim, and concluded that it was highly unlikely that Dr Salim could have carried out the studies involved in the time and places claimed and in the sequence reported. The editors stopped short of unilateral retraction of the papers they had published, but instead declared that they were 'withdrawing aegis', that is, they would no longer vouch for their quality.

There is insufficient space in this editorial to go into detail, but it needs to be stated that some of the animal work purporting to lead to Dr Salim's clinical studies was reported in the *Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology* (39: 562–564; 40: 448–450; 41: 566–568; 42: 64–67; 42: 125–127). Reflecting on the correspondence surrounding this animal work, it can be seen that although the referees had reservations about the work, they were more inclined to help the author sort out the problems rather than deduce the work itself was fraudulent; hence my contention above that referees and editors are basically trusting people. Even now, it is only the misgivings that surround Dr Salim's other published work that throws doubt on the animal studies, all of which are biochemically plausible. The editors of the *Journal of Laboratory and Clinical Medicine* used an interesting technique of 'rhetorical analysis' in their investigations. This is the technique of examining an author's body of published work for internal consistency, consistency with the knowledge of the time, double publications and other pointers such as the author's curriculum vitae. Such a technique as applied to Dr Salim's animal work as published in the *Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology* could well lead us to a similar conclusion, and may well need to be included in some way in any referee or editor's critique of submitted work. If so, it will be another sad distraction to the referee's prime and valued role as an assessor of the quality of work done in good faith by honest researchers.

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