

Plagiarism and misconduct in scientific publishing

It saddens me greatly to have to write an editorial regarding plagiarism and misconduct in scientific publishing. The need for such an editorial will be lost upon the vast majority of scientists who publish their research in scientific journals; however, I (and indeed other journal editors) have observed increasing evidence of plagiarism and misconduct in published research.

Plagiarism is a term often used within society but it seems that it is either poorly understood or deliberately misused. Plagiarism in academic research may occur in a number of different ways. These include the copying of sections of a published manuscript directly into another manuscript (including the copying of the author's own work), the publishing of sections of text and/or data that have been previously published without appropriate reference to the original text, and failure to cite previously published work where appropriate. In certain circumstances, there may be a need to fully explain previous work as this may act as the basis of the current publication; however, this must be clarified in the cited references of the newer publication.

Thankfully, the onset of the electronic era has allowed plagiarism in scientific publication to be more readily identified. For example, recognition software may now be employed to determine the similarity of submitted manuscripts to previously published manuscripts. Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology is currently investigating implementing such software in the hope that this will enable us to recognise potential cases of plagiarism at an early stage in the peer review process.

Whilst plagiarism of written work has been known for many years, more recently an increase in misconduct in scientific publication has been observed. Whilst the term misconduct may be widely interpreted, recent examples of this malpractice include the simultaneous submission of a manuscript to more than one journal, the falsification of data, the submission of a manuscript by the corresponding author without the consent of the other named authors and, finally, falsification of the signatures of authors at either the submission stage or when transferring copyright to the journal. Unfortunately it is significantly more difficult to identify potential misconduct than plagiarism.

As the Editor of the JPP, I consider scientific misconduct and plagiarism in publishing to be a serious offence. Manuscripts in which plagiarism and/or scientific misconduct is suspected will be thoroughly examined and, if it has been deemed that an offence has occurred, papers that have been published will be retracted in print and online, the authors will be sanctioned from publishing their research in the Journal for a suitable period (typically three years) and their host university or employer will be formally notified. JPP has recently introduced a set of ethical guidelines for authors, reviewers and editorial staff which can be found on the Journal's website at www.pharmpress.com/jpp. It is important to note that the working practices of the vast majority of authors will not be affected and therefore such authors should have no fear about these measures.

David S. Jones
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