

Editorial

Scientific Disputes and How OPRD Handles Them

This issue of *Organic Process Research & Development* (OPRD) presents an aspect of the scientific publishing world that is not usually revealed: disputes between scientists. As background, in 2007 we published a manuscript by researchers at Dr. Reddy's Laboratories that described the resolution of an important pharmaceutical agent: *S*-citalopram.¹ This interested researchers at Lundbeck, who had previously conducted extensive work on this molecule and sought to repeat some of the reported work. Following their investigation, they composed and sent us a manuscript disputing sections of the paper by Elati et al. and presented us with a quandary. How should such a situation be handled in OPRD? The last time the journal had experienced such a situation, a Letter to the Editor had sufficed. However, this dispute was more complicated and could have significant consequences both scientifically and legally. What was the fairest means to present each side's case while retaining the objective position of an editor? I thought a review of the actions we chose to follow would, first, allow an introduction to the three manuscripts published in this issue and, second, illustrate an example for handling future disputes.

The key point to emphasize is that no editor wishes to assume the role of judge or arbitrator. The integrity of scientific publications depends on our expectations that authors report the truth, referees discover where problems may exist, and others attempt to repeat the work. In this particular case, we thought the fairest means was to produce a virtual dialogue between the parties. Thus, we placed the disputing manuscript by Dancer and Lopez de Diego in the hands of three referees to judge the work and decide if it was worthy of publication, as we do for most manuscripts. The referees rendered informed and insightful suggestions that eventually produced the manuscript that follows this editorial.² This then formed the basis for Elati et al. to formulate a response.³ As a coda, the Lundbeck researchers were allowed a final reply⁴ to the response from Elati et al. Thus, in effect there are the original citalopram resolution paper¹ published in 2007, a manuscript disputing sections of it,² a response to the disputing manuscript,³ and finally a reply to the response.⁴ All four of these manuscripts have undergone rigorous peer review, and the referees have been made fully aware of the whole picture.

Upon my explanation of the situation through this editorial, the process is complete. You may read the data, reasoning, and debate between these two laboratories starting on page 23.²⁻⁴ Both parties expressed satisfaction with this protocol.

One of the aspects of the physical sciences that first attracted me is that there is an absolute truth in science. Something simply is or is not there, quantum considerations notwithstanding. Whatever the factual basis may be for citalopram resolution, we hope these papers may advance understanding of the issue and allow some clarity. We trust that our readers will gain a better understanding of a difficult situation and that we have illustrated a mechanism for handling similar disagreements that we may face in the future.

Jaan Pesti
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- (1) Elati, C. R.; Kolla, N.; Vankawala, P. J.; Gangula, S.; Chalamala, S.; Sundaram, V.; Bhattacharya, A.; Vurimidi, H.; Mathad, V. T. *Org. Process Res. Dev.* **2007**, *11*, 289.
(2) Dancer, R. J.; Lopez de Diego, H. *Org. Process Res. Dev.* **2009**, *13*, 23.
(3) Elati, C. R.; Kolla, N.; Mathad, V. T. *Org. Process Res. Dev.* **2009**, *13*, 34.
(4) Dancer, R. J.; Lopez de Diego, H. *Org. Process Res. Dev.* **2009**, *13*, 38.