

EDITORIAL

Crash in Publication Ethics in 2016 in a Glance: Avoid Paper Retraction

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On November 1st 2016, Springer Nature announced that Springer and BioMed Central are retracting 58 articles published by Iran-based authors across seven journals. The decision was made after thorough investigation following receiving allegations of plagiarism, peer review, and authorship manipulation in an effort to mislead the review system (1, 2). Not all papers were involved with all of the above issues, but each showed the evidence of at least one of these issues. At this time, we are not able to comment on the involvement of each individual author, but this has already added a black sheath to his or her records.

Recent increase in the number of publications obviated the need for ethics training. The word “retraction” is quite a dreaded word and no one wants their manuscript retracted. At the same time, there are many authors that do not even know how to publish ethically to avoid retractions.

In September 2016, a plagiarism loop was discovered ending up to retraction of a total of 6 papers of a pair of authors with mechanical engineering background based at the University of Tehran. This was explained as “copying from papers that had copied from others”. Although the authors are accusing a company for providing them with the plagiarized material, unethical steps in their publications can be traced (3).

In December 2016, another scandal was revealed by *4OR* journal. It published a brand new cheating attempt leading to black listing the authors with affiliation of *Young Researchers and Elite Club, Ardabil Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ardabil, Iran, Department of Engineering, Bilesuvar Moghan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Bilesuvar, Moghan, Iran, and Department of Electrical Engineering, Payame Noor University (PNU), Tehran, Iran* (4). In this attempt, the authors usurped the identity of a famous Dutch

economist by creating a counterfeit Yahoo email address under his name to submit the paper on his behalf. As the journal was doubted, the Editor-in-Chief inquires the Dutch scientist directly via his institutional email. He denies any involvement and states that this is the third time in a year he is involved in such a fraud (4).

It is predictable that in growing society, emerging ethical and unethical behaviors can be observed. We unfortunately read about the unethical actions in publications among Iranian scientists, which can endanger the reputation of the pairs who are doing research honestly and are pursuing every minute step toward ethical scientific publication. In an effort to bringing up the true spirit of research, we held workshops on “Medical Journalism” in our editorial office in Mashhad, Iran in 2014 and 2016 with the aim of emphasizing on ethics in writing. Following, we decided to revise our policies to be stricter with plagiarism checking, to be stricter about changing the names and the order of authors after submission, and to not accept papers from authors involved in any of these scenarios. *This includes the black list of current violating authors that will be updated upon receiving reports of unethical practice.* We follow regulations made by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). If any doubt, we might also ask the authors to provide the journal with the deidentified detailed data. Although this is not the end, we will keep trying to push the world of ethics forward in our own region.

We are now in the beginning of year 2017 after a not-to-long journey started in 2013. In retrospect, our journal is now indexed in all major databases including PubMed Central, Scopus, and Emerging Sources Citation Index (a Web of Science’s product), and we hope to become eligible to receive our first numerical metric, impact factor, in 2017, Inshallah.

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