Dealing with Authors’ Misconduct:
Difficulties, Dilemmas and Drawbacks

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What is scientific fraud?

“Deliberate fabrication or falsification of evidence with the intention to deceive or misinform peers and other audiences of scientific knowledge”

Shoddy science
(cooking, trimming, fiddling, fudging)

Fraud
(manufacturing data, altering exptl. results)
What is research misconduct?

✓ “is significant misbehaviour that improperly appropriates the intellectual property or contributions of others, that intentionally impedes the progress of research, or that risks corrupting the scientific record or compromising the integrity of scientific practices.”

The journal’s role in controlling misconduct

- Editors have a responsibility to pursue possible scientific misconduct
  - manuscripts submitted / published
  - publish a retraction of any fraudulent paper
- Have an obligation to develop written policies
- Respond to allegations of scientific misconduct and unethical publishing practices.

Issues an editor should consider when dealing with misconduct...

For editor
- Etiquette
- Ethics
- Error

Author intent
- Intentional malpractice
- Negligent practice

Once research misconduct has been defined, due process must be seen to be done; there must be access to the evidence, and the opportunity to refute allegations.
Editorial sanctions

**Private**
- Letter of explanation
- Letter of warning
- Letter to institution / funding body

**Public**
- Publication of notice: retraction, redundant publication
- Editorial, explaining full details

**Private / Public:**
- Ban on submissions: individual, unit, institution
- Report to medical council
Types of Misconduct

- Authorship Disputes
  - Plagiarism of authorship
  - Inappropriate attribution of authorship
  - Exclusion of legitimate authors
  - Naming author without informing him/her
  - Gift authorship

- Copyright violation
What can be done?

- **Authorship Disputes**
  - Clear guidelines on authorship
  - Journal requires contribution of each author to be stated
  - Guarantor
  - Signature of all authors to be submitted

- **Copyright violation**
  - Clear statement on copyright in the “information to authors” section
  - Copyright transfer form to be signed by all authors
  - Legal action

*Nothing can be done when authors plead ignorance*
Types of Misconduct - manuscript

- Submitting same manuscript to two journals simultaneously
  - Clear signed undertaking
- Duplicate publication
  - Retraction
- Salami publication
  - Nothing can be done
- Plagiarism
  - Retraction, warning, blacklisting
Detecting plagiarism

- Critical review – high index of suspicion
- Using search engines – search for phrases
  - Google, Dogpile, Alltheweb
- Medline, full text article of online journals
- Comparing “fingerprint” of paper with others
  - www.plagiarism.org; www.turnitin.com;
    www.plagiserve.com
- Software available
  - Essay Verification Engine (EVE2), WCopyfind,
    Glatt Plagiarism Screening Services

Types of Misconduct

- Fraud
  - Cooking up data, to get significance
  - Data fudging to prove/disprove hypothesis
  - Distorted representation of other researchers' results
  - Statistical alteration
  - Manipulation of figures, photographs
  - Suppression of negative findings
  - Reporting only findings supporting the hypothesis
Fraud – What can be done?

- Contributors need to keep raw data for 5 years after publication
- Repository for data
- Undertaking that data can be given for scrutiny
- Electronic figures (photographs) can be checked
- **Before publication** - editor can write to institute and inform employer
- **After publication** - retraction, stating the reason
- Need for an independent committee like ORI
Types of Misconduct

- **Unethical behaviour**
  - Not declaring conflict of interest when it exists
  - Giving wrong affiliation / address
  - Threatening editor after rejection
  - Trying to pressurize referees
  - Presenting high profile results through the media prior to peer review
Editorial policies to handle misconduct

- Reporting suspect manuscripts
- Procedures for handling suspect manuscripts
- Co-author signatures
- Submission of data
- Guidelines for reviewers
- Retractions/corrections
A true story…

- A manuscript was submitted to a referee who rejected the paper with the comments that the results were probably cooked up and that the work was very poor.
- Subsequently the editor “discovered” that the referee was the second author of the manuscript.
- When contacted, the first author was “hurt” that the referee had rejected the paper because he was his “good friend”
- The referee’s signature had been forged in the declaration form.
Reporting suspect manuscripts

- **Legal consequences?**
  - Notification in the journal’s instructions to authors that the journal may forward the allegations to funding agency or institute
  - Notify that action will be taken if misconduct is proved
Procedures for handling suspect manuscripts

- Draw-up standard operating procedures
- If suspect manuscripts are simply rejected they may end up published by another journal
In conclusion,

- Author misconduct is a significant problem
- Editors of medical journals and institutions in India have not developed a coherent response to the problem
- Unless tackled head-on, the problem will continue to grow
Thank you