

Cheating in Publications- Self or Others?

Zahid Hussain Khan

Department of Anesthesiology & Intensive Care, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

The ugly and abominable trend of bypassing the norms and codes laid down for international publications in biomedical journals remains unabated and unresolved. This trend is fully witnessed in the form of plagiarism, duplicate (redundant) or piecemeal publications. The authors somehow or the other manage to safely escape the barriers and filters and get their papers published least aware of the fact that they would be asked and summoned to face the charges leveled against them of not only deceiving the editorial staff of the journals where their spurious manuscripts got published but in deceiving the readership and intelligentsia worldwide.

Of late, authors have resorted to submitting their manuscripts simultaneously to more than one journal. This attitude per se is unethical as instructions to authors substantially clarify this issue that papers are to be submitted to one journal only. We cannot and should not be lenient in dealing with the culprit or trespasser on the grounds that he is fully aware of the instructions and norms, and knowingly, consciously and deliberately chooses the wrong and detestable path. Claiming to be writers and innovationists, we should adhere to the age old dictum to choose wisely and not poorly. When you start to choose wisely, wisdom is involved and that impels you to take all the steps gingerly and wisely lest your career is tarnished or your pride and ego are trampled. Literature is replete with instances that in most of the cases, duplicate publication occurs to boost the author's bibliography (1). When research work is conducted with the sole aim of acquiring prestigious curriculum vitae and higher positions, the sacred purpose of research gets defeated, and dishonesty and unscrupulous tactics come in and take their place (2). The designs and machinations of achieving promotions and obtaining grants are nefarious if dishonesty exists and must be done away with (3). According to the International Committee of Med J Editors, duplicate (or redundant) publication can be defined as 'publication of a paper that overlaps substantially with one already published in print or electronic media' (4). To bring an end to this menace or else to curtail it, referees with the necessary expertise of removing the wheat from the chaff should be selected (5). It appears that cross check

does little to address plagiarism of ideas (6), thus refusal to accept, any manuscripts from authors of articles that have breached the contract is one possible method of averting the entry of unwanted manuscripts (7,8).

We all are aware of the fact that the world is too big for our needs but not big enough for our greeds. When there is an element of greed in one's pursuits, then that person can go to the extent of submitting the same manuscript to multiple journals, reproducing a work in its entirety in another journal with total disregard to the niceties and norms of civilized codes such as attribution and permission (9) or else reporting sliced up, "salami" or piecemeal research work (7).

The entire staff of editorial boards of reputed journals are at their wit's end to accomplish the necessary cleansing and bringing out manuscripts that are totally free from irregularities pertaining to ethical standards. For original articles, data are needed and based on that you start to write an article. Without clay, you cannot make bricks, but the bricks must be authentic and totally prepared from the finest and genuine clay. There should be no machination or human will to alter the data or change them to suit one's interests or aim at one's theory. Data reveal that many theories conceived to be valid and true in the beginning turned out to be otherwise in the long run. When you purposely and connivingly change the data or else fabricate the data, you are trespassing the norms of publication and are bound to be caught and punished by those who hold in high esteem the ethical standards of publication. The Editor in-Chief guards his journal as the apple of his eye and under no circumstances would like to see distorted and fabricated data or redundant manuscripts published in his journal. Whom should we address as the final court of appeal in cases where ethical codes are trampled, and guilt is committed?

There are some trees which grow to the greatest heights. Others fail to achieve such heights and if you intervene in nature and help them to gain the heights for which they were not destined, such trees may grow but are bound to develop some unsightly eccentricity. A harvest to be reaped needs time and a colossal energy. This holds true for publications and under no

Corresponding Author: Zahid Hussain Khan

Department of Anesthesiology & Intensive Care, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran.
Tel. +982166581576, Fax +982166581537, E-mail:khanzh51@yahoo.com

Cheating in publications- self or others?

circumstances should be circumvented or an iota of plagiarism brought in or allowed. Authors definitely would not like to attain heights that would defame them or else bring in an element of eccentricity to their academic laurels by resorting to the most repugnant traits in publication such as plagiarism, redundant publications or else submitting fabricated or falsified data.

At times I am surprised at the harvest which some reap in a short time. A person should be convinced that his findings are without any fault. Our supreme goal should be to learn wisdom earlier or in late years of our career rather than never learning it at all. Devoid of wisdom, we are bound to take the wrong path and such a path in publications is punishable and rightly punishable.

Pressman (10) strongly argues against proposals permitting authors to send the same paper to several journals at a time on the grounds that the published results would become less reliable under a system of multiple submissions besides inflicting an incalculable harm to the entire profession.

In the end, I may reinforce that authors should appreciate the anxiety of the editors in apprehending the culprits who resort to unethical means in publishing their manuscripts because the editors also feel and are held accountable for part of the brunt and charges because they have inadvertently overlooked the matter which according to many is of grave import.

References

1. Chennagiri RJ, Critchley P, Giele H. Duplicate publication in the journal of hand surgery. *J Hand Surg* 2004;29:625-8.
2. Khan ZH . The sad saga and unfortunate trend of plagiarism in biomedical journals. Can we prevent this global avalanche? *Acta Med Iran* 2009; 47:249-250.
3. Khan ZH. How far do we observe publication ethics and decorum? *Acta Med Iran* 2012;50:655-6.
4. International committee of medical journal editors. Uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals. Philadelphia: International committee of medical journal editors; 2007. Available from: <http://www.icmje.org/>.
5. Khan ZH .The challenge for the current millennium to ensure smooth sailing of the titanic. *Acta Med Iran* 1999;4:197-98.
6. Resnik DB. Plagiarism: words and ideas. *Account Res* 2012;19:269-72.
7. Block AJ. Ethics. *Chest* 2001;119(2):321.
8. Lee Y. War on research misconduct. *Korean J Anesthesiol* 2013;65:1.
9. Neill US. Publish or perish, but at what cost? *J Clin Invest* 2008;118:2368.
10. Pressman S. Simultaneous multiple journal submissions: The case against. *AJES* 1994;53:316-33.