

How Far Do We Observe Publication Ethics and Decorum?

Zahid Hussain Khan

Department of Anesthesiology, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

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The congress titled, "Annual scientific congress of the Iranian Society of Medical Editors in association with the Committee of Publication Ethics [COPE]" was held under the theme of "Publication Ethics" in Shiraz from 24-25 November 2011, both days inclusive (1).

Ever since the highly detestable trend of plagiarism, redundant and duplicate publications have made their way intriguingly and connivingly at a snail's speed into the medical literature, the editors all over the world perceiving the ignoble impact of these ugly traits have become alerted.

This was the first time that a congress of such a magnitude was arranged where the Editors-in-Chief of the local journals along with their counterparts from the continents of Asia, Africa and Europe were present as invited speakers together with a packed hall of participants from inside the country including our esteemed journal- *Acta Medica Iranica*. After recitation of verses from the Holy Quran, the congress was formally inaugurated. The speakers touched on sensitive issues pertaining to publication ethics such as plagiarism, fabrication, conflict of interest and authorship criteria.

Each session was followed by a panel discussion where in the participants actively exchanged their views and offered constructive comments. All the participants and the speakers vowed their pledge to apply strict and stringent rules to curb the menace of plagiarism; although a formidable task but all appeared determined to find a remedy for the malaise.

Presently, the members of the editorial boards of all reputed journals adhere to the principle that such acts of misdemeanor on behalf of authors should stop with immediate effect. Unfortunately some authors or to be more exact so called authors fail to abide by the laws of publication and succeed in publishing fraudulent papers replete with plagiarism and falsification of data in their quest to chisel promotions, grants and financial gifts.

The fact that financial and other incentives exert a significant influence over human behavior would seem intuitive based on observations from daily experience

(2). A hot talk has brewed over which has caused the editorial boards, ethics and audit committees to subject all submitted manuscripts to strict vigilance, screening, incredibly thorough cross check, and in this regard all of the innumerable websites fortunately provide reasonably high quality plagiarism search at virtually no cost (3,4). Upon getting the slightest clue of plagiarism, the editors withhold the publication of the manuscript or else retract it if it has escaped the filtering process and got published apart from blacklisting all the contributors and sending a severe reprimand to the institutions to withdraw their promotions. Nobody is allowed to perform plagiarism with immunity. The designs and machinations of achieving promotion and obtaining grants are nefarious if dishonesty exists and must be done away with.

There is presently considerable skepticism about the genuineness of the manuscripts being submitted. An author who boasts about his research work should endeavor to contrive his overtures so that he remains impregnable and this is only possible if utmost honesty is practiced while preparing manuscripts.

Researchers are obliged to respect the rights of their patients and obtain informed consent for any intervention. The ethics committees have authorization to withhold trials that fail to observe these protocols. Any conflict of interest must be disclosed by authors and speakers, failing which they would be facing penalties which at times are career wrecking. Shades of plagiarism do appear in literature. However an even more baleful aspect of the tragedy is when a canny writer copy pastes someone else's work in his/her manuscript. To me this is a professional theft and this unethical behavior is far worse and detestable than a highway robbery (5). If we retrace history, it would dawn on us that the ethical teachings and creative works of our predecessors Avicenna and Rhazes (Figures 1 and 2) served as the basis of our modern day science and it is incumbent on us to follow the teachings of these stalwarts and publish impeccable works with not an iota of plagiarism in them.

Corresponding Author: Zahid Hussain Khan

Department of Anesthesiology, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran
Tel: +98 21 61192637, Fax: +98 21 66581537, E-mail: kxanzh51@yahoo.com



Figure 1. Avicenna



Figure 2. Zakaria al-Razi (Rhazes)

In their times, only Avicenna and Rhazes became renowned. Others pursued such goals but are not remembered at all. In our present day world only a few would be remembered as writers and others who have produced manuscripts just for promotion sake and published them in mediocre journals will never be cited by generations to come.

The present trend of promoting faculty members with just one or two ISI publication is again a subject of debate because somehow or the other, the papers would be published through connivance, resourcefulness and out of proportional help. Do we really intend to promote all the faculty members to higher ranks whether they do possess the trait and talent of writing or not, or shall we be more cautions in granting such promotions to only those who really deserve them because plagiarism has been invariably found among the publications of those authors whose ultimate aim is to acquire promotion and thus some how or the other succeed in publishing their works in journals that are hardly read and least connected to their specialty but unfortunately indexed in ISI or PubMed?

In the closing ceremony of the congress, it was decided that authors should honestly abide by the rules of publication and adhere to all the moral and ethical standards in their endeavor to publish their works giving

credence to the acknowledged fact that dishonesty prevails in medical literature and plagiarism is to be feared. Furthermore it was upheld that all cases of plagiarism should be brought to be notice of the departments and the institutions so as to create an atmosphere where we can proudly claim of our honesty and professional integrity.

In the end, I would conclude that everyone harvests the fruits of his own deeds and in this regard, authors are not an exception.

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