Research and publication ethics

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http://healthsystemsglobal.org/

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http://www.biomedcentral.com/
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Research Integrity Manager, Research Integrity Group, Springer Nature

Diana Marshall
Publisher, BMC-series journals
# Overview

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Research involving humans

1.0
Research ethics: humans

- Declaration of Helsinki
  - Ethical principles for medical research involving human subjects

https://www.wma.net/policies-post/wma-declaration-of-helsinki-ethical-principles-for-medical-research-involving-human-subjects/
Research ethics: humans

Editorial policies

• **All** studies involving human subjects, human material, human data must have:

• A statement on ethics in the manuscript, including:
  • The name of the ethics committee
  • The reference number

• Exemptions (granted by ethics committees) should also be detailed in the manuscript
• Ethics approval should be local
  • Local ethics approval means local to the participants
Research ethics: humans

Many different study designs need ethics approval

- Interventional studies
- Observational studies
- Prospective studies
- Retrospective studies
- Cross sectional surveys (online or paper)
- Focus groups/interviews
- Patients, volunteers, health professionals, students
- Samples (blood, sputum, wound swabs, urine, tissue etc.)
- Data
Research ethics: case

• Researchers recruit patients to a trial to test a new drug for rheumatoid arthritis

• Patients are divided into two groups:
  • Group 1: receive standard treatment plus the new drug
  • Group 2: receive standard treatment plus placebo

• Patients are not told they are part of a trial

• Are there any ethical concerns?

• Yes – participants should be aware that they are taking part in a trial and give informed consent
Consent to participate

• If your study involves human participants, you need to get informed consent from them before you start

• Journals will ask you to state in your manuscript that you got informed consent

• This includes:
  • All prospective studies
  • Interviews
  • Focus groups
  • Samples
  • Parental consent for children
Research ethics: case

- Researchers want to test a new, untested drug for treating Helicobacter pylori
- Patients provide informed consent

- Patients are divided into three groups:
  - Group 1 are treated with standard therapy plus new drug
  - Group 2 are treated with standard therapy plus placebo
  - Group 3 are treated with the new drug only

- Are there any ethical concerns?

- Yes – there is already an effective standard therapy which shouldn’t be withheld for the purposes of research
Consent for publication

• Informed consent is needed to publish any images or details of individuals
• Journals will ask for a statement about this in your manuscript
• **Examples:**
  • Individual data: age, sex, diagnosis, occupation (particularly case reports)
  • Images: anything they could potentially be recognised from
  • Quotes: if participant identifiable
Consent for publication: what is identifiable?

• Self-recognisable or recognisable by a close friend or relative
• Combination of indirect identifiers e.g. (Hrynaszkiewicz et al. Trials 2010 11:9)
  • Place of treatment
  • Sex
  • Household/family composition
  • Year of birth or age

• Consider whether details/images are needed
• Consider whether images should be cropped (consent still needed)
Trial registration

Clinical trials must be registered in a suitable registry before 1st participant is enrolled

- **Clinical trial**: “any research study that prospectively assigns human participants or groups of humans to one or more health-related interventions to evaluate the effects on health outcomes.” (WHO)

- **Health-related intervention**: “any intervention used to modify a biomedical or health-related outcome” (ICMJE)

- **Health outcome**: “any biomedical or health-related measures obtained in patients or participants, including pharmacokinetic measures and adverse events” (ICMJE)
Trial registration: benefits

- Prevents publication bias and selective reporting
- Opportunities for collaboration
- Reduces duplication of research efforts
- Improves awareness of trials (for clinicians, researchers, patients and the public)
Trial registration: registering your trial

Where?
- Any primary register of WHO International Clinical Trials Registry Platform
- clinicaltrials.gov
- ISRCTN

When?
- Before you enrol the first participant
- Retrospectively registered studies considered at the editor’s discretion

Considerations at submission
- Always include the trial registration number (TRN) in your manuscript
  - Last line of abstract for BMC
- Describe any changes from the trial registry record (with reasons)
Research involving animals
Research ethics: animals

• For all vertebrates and regulated invertebrates

• Need ethics approval if committee exists
• If not: compliance with institutional, national, or international guidelines

• Follow principles of the 3Rs:
  • Replacement
  • Reduction
  • Refinement
Questions so far...
Publication ethics

3.0
What is publication ethics?

“A set of common rules among authors, editors, reviewers and publishers to protect integrity of the scientific record”

*Charlotte Haug, previous Vice Chair COPE*

Based on **consensus** about standards and best practice
Ensures the **integrity** of the scientific record
Ensures that readers can **trust** what they read
How do editors deal with publication ethics issues?
Publication ethics: avoiding problems

- Before you start your research
Authorship: case

- A researcher needs a favour from a colleague
- In return they offer to add the colleague as an author on their paper
- The colleague did not make a substantial contribution to the work described in the paper

- Is this ok?

- No – this is gift authorship. All authors must have made a substantive contribution to the work.
Authorship

The ICMJE recommends that authorship be based on the following 4 criteria:

1. Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; AND
2. Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND
3. Final approval of the version to be published; AND
4. Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

Authorship: problems

- Authorship disputes
  - Being unable to agree upon who should be an author

- Gift authorship
  - Including someone who took little or no part in the research

- Ghost authorship
  - Leaving out someone who did take part
Authorship: case

• A paper is submitted to a journal by the corresponding author listing three authors
• When revisions as submitted, the corresponding author leaves one author off
• The editor pauses the peer review process and asks the corresponding author why one of the authors has been removed
• The corresponding author says that the co-author was added on by accident and isn't an author
• The editor asks the authors to complete a change in authorship form including:
  • New authorship list and author contributions section
  • Reason for the change
  • Signatures from all authors that they agree to the change
• The authors cannot agree among themselves on who should be listed as authors
• The editor cannot proceed with peer review until the authorship is resolved and asks the authors to contact their institution to determine who should be listed as an author on the paper
Authorship: tips for avoiding problems

- Agree on authorship early
- Use ICMJE criteria
- Provide author contributions in manuscript
- Provide correct email addresses for all authors
- Tell the editor about any changes
Get an ORCiD

DISTINGUISH YOURSELF IN THREE EASY STEPS

ORCID provides a persistent digital identifier that distinguishes you from every other researcher and, through integration in key research workflows such as manuscript and grant submission, supports automated linkages between you and your professional activities ensuring that your work is recognized. Find out more.

1 REGISTER  Get your unique ORCID identifier Register now!  Registration takes 30 seconds.

2 ADD YOUR INFO  Enhance your ORCID record with your professional information and link to your other identifiers (such as Scopus or ResearcherID or LinkedIn).

3 USE YOUR ORCID ID  Include your ORCID identifier on your Webpage, when you submit publications, apply for grants, and in any research workflow to ensure you get credit for your work.
Publication ethics: avoiding problems

- Reporting your research and writing your manuscript
Reporting your results

• Present your findings honestly and transparently
• Provide sufficient detail in your methods so that researchers know what you did
• Do not cherry pick data
• Do not overstate your conclusions
## Reporting your results: reporting guidelines

### Reporting guidelines for main study types

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See all 291 reporting guidelines

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[www.equator-network.org/](http://www.equator-network.org/)
Plagiarism

“The appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit.”
- The Office of Research Integrity

- Deprives original source of credit
- Distorts the literature
- Can breach copyright

Consequences for the author:
- May result in rejection of the manuscript
- May result in retraction if published
- Journal may contact institution
Plagiarism: case

• An author is in a rush to complete his paper and needs to write the discussion section
• He has found lots of published papers saying the thing he wants to say and he doesn’t have time to write this section in his own words
• He finds it hard to write in English as it isn’t his first language
• He decides to copy and paste these sentences into his paper as they’re all from different articles so he isn’t copying too much from any one article

• The paper is submitted to a journal
• The editor runs plagiarism detection software
• The software identifies lots of direct overlap from a number of different papers
Plagiarism: case (continued)

• The editor consults the relevant COPE flowchart
  • He looks at the papers side by side to address the degree of overlap
  • He asks the authors for an explanation of the overlap

• The author explains that he hasn’t copied much from any individual article and that most of them have been cited in the reference list
  • He also says that he finds it hard to write in English

• The editor is not happy with the response and rejects the paper and contacts the authors’ institution to let them know about the plagiarism
Plagiarism: lessons from case

• Always write in your own words
• Direct overlap (without quotation marks) is not ok, even if the original sources are cited
• If you struggle to write in English – ask for help

Potential consequences of plagiarism:
• Delays to the peer review process
• Rewriting of the paper
• Rejection of the paper
• Editor may contact the authors’ institutions
• Wastes editors and reviewers time
• If not detected before publication, may result in retraction
Text recycling

- Is it ok to reuse your own text from a previously published article?

- Answer: it depends
Text recycling

- Sometimes called ‘self-plagiarism’
- Duplication of text from authors’ own previous publication
- Usually without attribution
- Acceptability depends on journals’ policy

Tips

- Avoid covert text recycling
- May be necessary (or desirable) in some cases (e.g. methods)
- Transparency

How to deal with text recycling

There are guidelines to help editors deal with cases of text recycling.

Text recycling, also known as self-plagiarism, occurs when sections of the same text appear literally or substantially in more than one of a writer’s own publications. This may happen if text is extensively recycled or if an author mistakenly submits the same manuscript multiple times.

Tips:

- Avoid covert text recycling
- May be necessary (or desirable) in some cases (e.g. methods)
- Transparency

When should action be considered?

Text recycling occurs in submitted research or published articles. It can occur in different articles: type A (true plagiarism), type B (self-plagiarism), and type C (text recycling) or deliberate overlap in the text.

How can editors deal with text recycling?

Editors should consider the case of text recycling on an individual basis. The structure of the text, the overlap of the text, and the originality of the text should be considered.

- How much text is recycled?
- Where is the text from the other text?
- Within what context is the text from the other text?
- When is the text from the other text?
- Was the text from the other text recycled?
- How is the text from the other text

Research articles

More at www.biomedcentral.com
Text recycling: case

- Researchers have published an article reporting the primary outcomes of a large RCT
- They now want to publish another article reporting the secondary outcomes
- The methods used are the same

How can they report the methods in their new paper?

Original published article methods:
This study was a randomised controlled trial (RCT) conducted in four teaching hospitals in London. Patients were recruited between January 2007 and December 2008. Patients were eligible for inclusion in the study if they were over the age of 18 and had undergone an elective laparoscopic cholecystectomy... (the methods would then be described in detail)
Text recycling: case

Transparently!

Methods (new article):

The full methods of this study have already been reported in our previous article [6]. Briefly, we conducted a randomised controlled trial involving patients over the age of 18 who had undergone and elective laparoscopic cholecystectomy in 2013/14 in one of four London teaching hospitals.
Images

Guidelines of Journal of Cell Biology:

• All digital images in manuscripts considered for publication will be scrutinized for any indication of manipulation that is inconsistent with the following guidelines. Manipulation that violates these guidelines may result in delays in manuscript processing or rejection, or retraction of a published article.

• No specific feature within an image may be enhanced, obscured, moved, removed, or introduced.

• The grouping of images from different parts of the same gel, or from different gels, fields, or exposures, must be made explicit by the arrangement of the figure (i.e. using dividing lines) and in the text of the figure legend.

• Adjustments of brightness, contrast, or color balance are acceptable if they are applied to every pixel in the image and as long as they do not obscure, eliminate, or misrepresent any information present in the original, including the background. Non-linear adjustments (e.g. changes to gamma settings) must be disclosed in the figure legend.

from http://jcb.rupress.org/forA
Competing interests

Competing interests (CI) can be:

• Financial
• Non-financial

Importance of declaring CI on submission

• Editor is aware during manuscript assessments
• Editor will not invite reviewers with the same CI
• Reviewers are aware when assessing manuscript
• Readers are aware once published
• Editors/reviewers/readers are able to judge whether they are relevant

Declaring a CI does not mean that an article will not be published
Undeclared competing interests

More problematic

May be identified by:
  • Editor
  • Reviewer

Potential consequences
  • Delays to review process
  • Rejection
  • Publication of a correction article
Publication ethics: avoiding problems

- Submitting your manuscript

3.3
Submitting your manuscript

• Is it ok to submit to more than one journal at once?

Consequences of duplicate submission:
• Rejection of both manuscripts
• Editor may contact the authors’ institution
• Duplicate publication
• May lead to retraction (14.2% of all retractions)
• Biases the literature
• Wastes editors’ and reviewers’ time
Tips to avoid duplicate submission

• Look at the journal’s duplicate publication policy
• Don’t submit to more than one journal at once
• Tell the editor if you think there may be overlap
Thank you – and more questions

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