

Warm up

Fraud and misconduct in publication

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Every year, the editors of all journals face examples of fraudulent publication. At the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, it may surprise readers to note that we pick up three to four cases a year. Mostly these are examples of duplicate or redundant publication where an author submits the same paper to two (or more) journals presumably in the guise of boosting their curriculum vitae. Given that often the only difference is the title of the paper, this can hardly have been an oversight in addressing the envelope! More significant academic fraud is also occasionally picked up where results do not make sense or the same results have been published previously as a different experiment. We rely very much on the quality of our review process to detect much of this and while fraudulent behaviour is disconcerting, it pleases me that reviewers manage to pick this up relatively quickly. Although the main reason for increasing the number of

reviewers that see each manuscript and to develop a database of newer and more widely spread reviewers is to improve the quality of the published journal, an important spin off is that these reviewers also represent the current researchers in a given area and are generally widely read in their field resulting in a greater chance of detecting such fraud.

The advent of the online Bench>Press manuscript tracking system within the BMJ Publishing Group means that a reviewer who receives a manuscript for review has the easy option of doing an online search for other articles by the author(s) and on the same subject. All this can be done rapidly from within the reviewer's online menu in the manuscript tracking system.

Another important issue that is difficult to change is the excessive number of authors that are appending their names to manuscripts. Usually the head of department takes the final spot on the

list, occasionally pressuring junior researchers to allow this. Just how some large author teams have contributed to the manuscript needs some explaining. In line with many other journals, we will be introducing more strict documentation of the role that each and every author has had in the manuscript.

For the erstwhile professor with the tendency to add his or her name to the list, a recent problem highlighted a further risk of this behaviour. This was where a junior researcher had fraudulently made up a series of results to support a contention within the paper and then the head of department added his name to the author list and it was duly sent off to the journal. The subsequent claim by the professor concerned that he had not read the manuscript fell on fairly deaf ears. Tarred with the same brush! The difficult issue is that the higher up the greasy pole of academia one climbs, the greater the fall when things go pear shaped.

It may also be politic for the various sports medicine colleges and other institutions to consider training in research ethics or, at the very least, adopting the various published guidelines on research misconduct. A small step in the right direction.

To paraphrase a famous US president, the price of trust is eternal vigilance.

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Expression of concern about content of which Dr Paul McCrory is a single author

This paper is authored by Dr Paul McCrory. During 2021 and 2022 there was an investigation by BJSM and BMJ which found that some of his work was the product of publication misconduct. Such misconduct includes plagiarism, duplicate publication, misquotation and misrepresentation in publications in respect of which he was listed as the sole author.¹ We are placing a notice to readers on all content in relation to which he is identified as the sole author to alert them to the conclusions of our investigation.

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REFERENCE

- 1 Macdonald H, Ragavooloo S, Abbasi K. Update into the investigation of former BJSM editor-in-chief Paul McCrory. *Br J Sports Med* 2022.