Annual Meeting Reports

How Easy to Cheat?
How Easy to Uncover Cheating?

Moderator:
Penny Hodgson
Duke Clinical Research Institute
Durham, North Carolina

Speakers:
Trish Groves
BMJ
London, United Kingdom

Thomas C Gerber
Mayo Clinic
Jacksonville, Florida

Margaret Winker
Journal of the American Medical Association
Chicago, Illinois

Reporters:
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Mayo Clinic
Scottsdale, Arizona

Scientific misconduct encompasses plagiarism; redundant publication; unearned authorship; conflict of interest; and data filtering, falsification, and fabrication, which include image manipulation (such as splicing or altering contrast).1 Moderator Penny Hodgson noted that known misdeeds may be “the tip of the iceberg”. In his overview, Thomas C Gerber said that such cheating causes nearly irreparable damage. Retractions are not as retrievable as falsified papers, whose publication damages treatment advances and impedes research. Both Gerber and Trish Groves cited a Nature survey of US scientists receiving National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding2; 1.4% identified one plagiarized submission from CrossRef member publications and calculates the percentage of overlap. In a recent 6-month trial, the BMJ Group used CrossCheck to screen papers near acceptance against about 30,000 new submissions to four journals and to “crawl” the medical literature after publication. The system identified one plagiarized submission from an author in a developing country (100% match) and one postpublication violation on a Russian Web site (90% match).

Disadvantages were limited access, system slowness, and staff time. Advantages were reasonable cost (about $0.75 per manuscript), ability to identify verbatim content (not paraphrased text, images, or formulas), and applicability at various stages.

Thomson Reuters has announced that CrossRef will be offered through Manuscript Central. Such integration should automate searches, but Groves recommended setting the percentage threshold high. Early checking might reduce editorial investment but increase direct costs, whereas later checking might decrease deterrence.

Participants expressed concern about duplicated ideas, methods, and results. As with plagiarism, duplicate publication muddies the literature and undermines systematic reviews. Authors should be reprimanded and, if necessary, reported, banned, and exposed. Margaret Winker noted that the key to reducing duplicate publication and other misconduct may be better education for authors.

Winker encouraged consensus among authors and editors on what constitutes duplicate publication, which is reported more often than plagiarism,3 appears to be increasing,4 and is often justified by authors.5 She recommended a top-down decision tree for identifying duplicate publication.6

References