

Editorial

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15446/revfacmed.v65n4.70190>

Duplicate publications in the Journal of the Faculty of Medicine

Scientific misconduct must be condemned for various reasons. (1) When an author or authors decide to submit the same article to different scientific journals, editorial work initiates, consuming all kinds of resources, since the journals must evaluate said manuscript until its final publication. This is a costly process considering the working hours of editors, members of scientific committees, peer reviewers, editorial assistants, proofreaders, translators, graphic designers and other professionals involved. It also affects greatly scientific journals because of the huge expenditure of economic resources that the whole process entails.

Currently, all scientific publications need to have at least one program that identifies high percentages of similarities between articles. Although there is not a consensus regarding the cut-off point for similarity in different biomedical publications, the Journal of the Faculty of Medicine established 30% as the parameter to be considered. A higher percentage of similarity is only accepted for articles derived from doctoral or master's theses and final graduation works, as long as the authors clearly state that the article is a by-product of said works in the body of the manuscript.

Unfortunately, some authors of scientific articles commit these types of errors, either by mistake or the need of publishing as fast as possible to preserve their status in the academic community or to remain in important positions in higher education institutions or research centers that require so. The scientific journals, in general, ask the authors to submit only unpublished articles and not to submit the same article to several journals simultaneously. This unethical behavior, at least from an academic and scientific point of view, is detected today more easily than in past decades. Different search engines on the internet, anti-plagiarism programs and the audit work of the readers allow to identify these type of cases, leading the editors of the journals to make difficult decisions with increasing frequency.

The World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) (2), in an article published in 2002 on its website, reflected on an analysis they made of a duplicate publication and posed the following questions in this regard:

"The questions with which we grappled were as follows:

1. Should the manuscript be automatically rejected for consideration by us?
2. Should we inform the other Journal that we had received the identical manuscript for consideration despite the covering letters?
3. How do we deal with the authors of the manuscript who clearly attempted to mislead the editors of two journals with regard to their submissions? Should this be made public by publishing the details in an editorial in the Journal? Should the offending authors be named? Should we refuse further submissions from these authors because of their dishonesty? One of the authors was the Department Chairman of a prominent medical school." (2)

These questions, and their respective answers, were considered by the Journal of the Faculty of Medicine to solve the following case: the issue 3 of volume 65 of this year included an article that had been already published; said article was presented, obviously, with an authorship letter signed by the authors, who stated that it was unpublished and had not been sent to any other journal for publication. However, the article was submitted to another journal which published it first. This duplicate original article was initially reported on social networks and then by some of the readers to the Publications Unit of the Faculty of Medicine of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia. The information indicated that the same article, with little variations, had also been published in the *Revista Medicina de la Academia Nacional de Medicina de Colombia* (Medicine Journal of the National Academy of Medicine of Colombia). Previously, another similar case was also detected by this Journal and reported in conjunction with the *Revista Colombiana de Obstetricia y Ginecología* (Colombian Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology).

After the corresponding consultations, the original article was completely removed from the Journal of the Faculty of Medicine, since the response provided by the authors regarding the request for an explanation on the subject was not satisfactory. Likewise, the Journal decided to publish this editor's statement. Furthermore, a previously published editorial noted that the consequences of random, systematic errors and, in particular, misconduct in scientific publications not only affect the editorial teams of the journals, but also have an impact on the quality of scientific research and enable a chain reaction that affects users of health research. (1)

Finally, it is worth noting that the contributions made by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) (3) have been highly important in the field of scientific publications and in protecting the best ethical behaviors of authors, peer reviewers, editors of scientific journals, among others. Nonetheless, it is worth listing again such questionable (from an ethical point of view) acts, which should be taken into account by the editorial teams of scientific publications: author's mistakes; authorship; changes in authorship; consent for publication; copyright infringement; fabrication, manipulation and falsification of data; disputes related to authorship; independence and editorial misconduct; ghostwriters; gift authorship; manipulation of images; lack of ethical approval; unethical research; unethical treatments; misleading information; multiple submissions; overlap of publications; patient's confidentiality; peer review process; plagiarism; self-plagiarism; undeclared financial support for publication, among others. (1,3)

These human behaviors are already known and should be taken into account mainly by the editors, who should be aware of the situation to apply prevention and rejection measures when necessary. However, it should also be mentioned that the different academic and scientific

communities do not have a clear agreement regarding the response to each of these faults and what the corresponding sanctions should be.

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