

Publication Ethics

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Research is an integral part of undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum of medical colleges and universities. Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan put a great emphasis on high quality research and its publication in quality journals. Medical writing workshops are frequently conducted to train researchers in formulating hypothesis, literature search strategy, epidemiology, biostatistics etc, however publication ethics is often not addressed. Medical editors frequently receive articles where principles of publication ethics are either not addressed or violated. Most of the researchers, at inquiry, accept that their awareness about these issues is either lacking or marginal. It is time that editors take up this issue as a challenge and start working on how to address it.

Publication ethics include authorship criteria, falsification / fabrication of data, salami slice, plagiarism, duplicate submission, redundant publication, violation of code of ethics, failure to declare conflict of interest, human subject research without Institutional Review Board permission etc. Journals must publish briefly in each issue the definitions of above terms and consequences arising out of it. Links may be provided to various organizations that provide guidelines in relations to these issues like Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) and others. Many journals have published articles on publication ethics and specific issues like what amounts to authorship etc. It is also suggested that each journal must publish clear instructions to the authors on the subject of publication ethics. This will be a gentle reminder for the authors.¹⁻³

Pakistan Association of Medical Editors (PAME) has been active in this regard. It has arranged many workshops on the publication ethics, medical writing and peer review to sensitize participants and editors of medical journals as to the importance of observing principles of publication ethics. Editors have moral

responsibility to investigate further if any submission is found violating principles of publication ethics. An explanation must be sought from the corresponding author and all the co-authors. Any unsatisfactory response or non response must take into loop the head of the institution and prompt inquiry must be demanded. Guidelines are available on COPE website in such instances and may be referred to its subcommittee. PAME has also constituted an advisory body composed of senior editors of medical journals which can facilitate the editors in this regard if required. Retraction of the article and blacklisting of authors from further submissions are few consequences of such fraudulent act.

Both the researchers and editors have the responsibility in reporting and publishing quality research by ensuring transparency and truthfulness. New knowledge can have far reaching consequences on health of human subjects. This will help society in progressing and flourishing. It will also build a trust between healthcare providers and communities.

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