

A New Example of Unethical Behaviour in the Academic Journal "Medical Archives"

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Recently at a meeting of the European Association of Science Editors Council, held in Split on June 13, 2014 I said that the editorial job in journals is serious, responsible, hard, and lately it also becomes dangerous. That job, really, requires, besides rich knowledge and experience, also "wasting" a lot of time, nerves and renunciation of all kinds in order that journals that we edit, in their final form are rich with content, contains articles of superior/high scientific quality, results of research that can interest potential readers and users of scientific published content, but also linguistically, aesthetically and technically acceptable to attract and meet the needs and taste of potential readers. All above mentioned is sometimes very easily unsuccessful or the efforts of the publishers, which have the teams of qualified and capable associates involved in at least six of technological stages—from submission, editing, linguistic and technical preparations, printing, converting in the XLM format for on-line databases and painstaking process of communication with authors and co-authors that sometimes become unsuccessful and very frustrating. Unfortunately, this last mentioned can make life difficult for the editor and shake or diminish his/hers sense of love and pleasures for this beautiful and above all socially useful, but hard work in all scientific and academic community centers in any country and at any level of its development.

The latest example of unethical behavior by one (or more authors) who have submitted their article in the Medical Archives to be published is so blatant that I decided to present it in this editorial. This is because I had to exchange with the author so much information and to present many evidences about the ethical tackle that written words and sentences have almost become the tools of criminal-legal process and if there are institutions and mechanisms, maybe I would start a lawsuit for academic humiliation and insult.

On the written warning by a respected fellow scientist (Figure 1), that I at least could publish as The Letter to the Editor, because it is written in such form (but my colleague asked to remain anonymous in this text, because he himself experienced unpleasant mails from the author of the article in question) I sent a letter to the authors and

warned them that the article, which was sent for publication in the Medical Archives (and which is for long time visible on PubMed), cannot be send to another journal (in this case ISRN Nephrology), because this violates the rules, codes and guidelines of COPE, EASE, WAME, ICMJE, etc., and that this process can follow appropriate penal consequences. After this started unpleasant correspondence through mails (which are also evidence in the legal sense), which was at the end devaluated to a mere explanation that three of my mails to the author from which I requested to comply with the rules that are written and publicly accessible by the mentioned association and to be followed by every editorial board of scientific journal which want to be taken seriously and which are transparently published on the website of the journal and listed in the Instructions for authors, ended in his spam box. Unfortunately, the main argument that I mentioned to the authors is that they could not send the same article, completely identical by content, in other journals and that they did not officially make a request to me as Editor of Medical Archives to withdraw the article from their own motives and reasons. The authors did not even want to accept certain steps that are obligatory, published on the official website through which their article is submitted. Part of the facts that I've described in this text is contained in the facts as scans of a letter that I have exchanged with a fellow scientist and which prove or substantiate my claims.

The fact is that unethical behavior in the academic community has become a kind of disease that every day takes the character of an epidemic. About Plagiarism in a scientific publications and other forms of unethical behavior in a scientific publication, I wrote a book that has aroused the attention of many colleagues, but also a series of articles that have been published in several scientific journals that can be downloaded from PubMed, PubMed Central and from other databases that cooperate with PubMed. These forms of behavior have existed much earlier but there were no technological possibilities and advantages (especially software packages to search the contents of the articles and books) that is now possible to discover them so fast and easy as today. True, even today, especially in

communities where authors publish their articles (and other forms of scientific and technical publications) in journals on domestic language, and are inaccessible to the wider international academic community, plagiarism is very present (1-14). It is detected locally, usually if individuals from personal motives and reasons decide to uncover and disclose someone's unethical academic acts, but in most cases the sanctioning of such unethical practices is done at the local level and by mild sanctions. However, when such attempt to raise the voice in a form as "a case of .." and later repetition of unethical behavior in articles by other authors, or by imposing certain sanctions on the level of the academic community in which the respective author worked or still work in an academic profession can produce some results (recently due proven plagiarism is dismissed Rector of the University of Pristina, Kosovo). First case of plagiarism this year was happened in February issue when author prof. Hatixhe Latifi-Popovci tried to publish her paper in our journal with title "Association Between Autoantibodies Against Thyroid Stimulating Hormone Receptor and Thyroid Diseases". After several and anonymous suggestions from Prishtina that this article was already published in the journal "Praxis Medica" in Albanian language and identical in content we received, it was decided to retract paper from our side. Also, Dean of the Faculty of medicine in Prishtina and Rector of University of Prishtina were informed about author's unethical behavior.

Plagiarism in scientific publications, especially scientific articles, is increasingly attracting the attention of the public in the Balkans. Governmental institutions as Ministry of Science and Education, Academy of Sciences and Arts, and specialized agencies to detect and combat plagiarism (CEON, in Belgrade, for example under the leadership of Mr. Pero Sipka) discuss a way to combat such phenomena in the future. Recently a web portal www.academlink.com published a short analysis of current events in the region and beyond that relates to scientific plagiarized papers detected in the recent past (see: <http://www.academlink.com/blog/view/19301/sporni-nauni-radovi>).

Authors of this analysis provided interpretation that in Serbia there is ongoing campaign about reviewing plagiarism of doctoral dissertation by Minister Nebojsa Stefanovic, and that the Rectors Council KONUS, which had the task to prove whether the work was actually plagiarized or not, declared to have no jurisdiction to review this doctorate. This indicates that conditions are not met or there is no power and will of academic community to fight seriously with the problem of plagiarized doctoral dissertations, master's theses, textbooks, especially scientific articles in journals. National Council for Higher Education of Serbia announced that in the fall will go out in public with a comprehensive analysis of the current status of the doctoral studies in Serbia (<http://www.academlink.com/blog/view/19315/konus-nenadlean-za-stefanovia>).

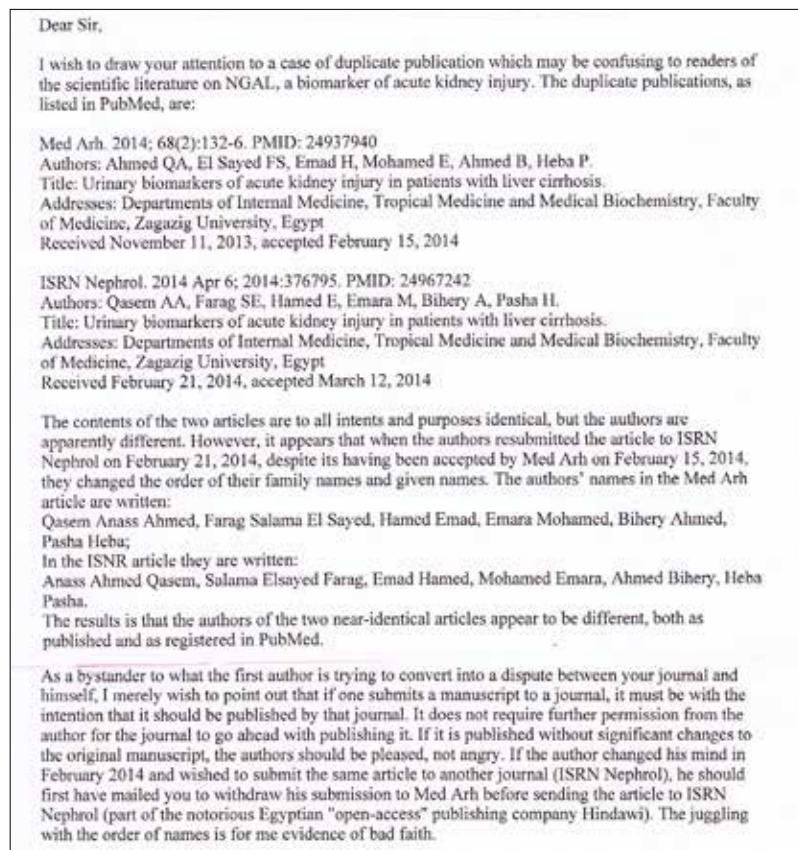


Figure 1. The letter to the Editor of "Medical Archives"

Also the authors of the analysis of doctorate written by Minister Nebojsa Stefanovic and Mica Jovanovic, announced that the thesis of Aleksandar Sagic is in some parts plagiarism. This information is published on the website of the Academia (<http://www.academlink.com/blog/view/19283/peaniki-doktorat-apia-plagijat>). According to the author's claims, some parts of the work are literal translations. The Senate of the University Union these days evaluating allegations that the doctoral dissertation of Aleksandar Sagic is plagiarism, as communicated by the University (detailed description of the parts referred to as the plagiarized: <http://www.academlink.com/blog/view/19291/union-non-Protecting-plagiarism-on-apievom-doctorate-10> July). Further more, the same portal is released an analysis of the doctorate written by the Mayor of Belgrade Sinisa Mali for which was also claimed, according to the author Rasa Karapandza, professor of finance at EBS Business School, to be plagiarism. Sinisa Mali last year defended his doctoral thesis entitled "Creating value through restructuring and privatization process—theoretical concepts and experiences of Serbia" at the Faculty of Organizational Sciences, University of Belgrade, and gained the title Doctor of Science (<http://www.academlink.com/blog/view/19313/peanik-i-doktorat-sinie-malog-je-plagijat>).

Furthermore, the author of the text on the same portal "Academik-link" states that the Slovenian academic public has problems with plagiarism. The Senate of the University of Maribor, confirmed that the degree of Brigita Kidric, director of Public Knowledge Institute and director of the Museum "Notranjsko", is plagiarism. The founders of the "Boris Kidric" Institute offered to Kidric to give her resig-

nation, which also ask employees of the museum (<http://www.academlink.com/blog/view/19299/potvrdjeno-diploma-kidrievje-plagijat>).

However, many facts presented in the media are saying that plagiarism in science is not the topic only in our region but in the whole world. Illustrative example is one of Japanese scientists who recently had to withdraw from the use their disputed study (this is a study of the scientist Haruko Obokata from the Center for Developmental Biology "Riken" in Japanese city of Kobe) whose results were published in the prestigious journal "Nature" in January this year. Haruko is accused by the colleagues as they failed to reproduce results of the research, for which is now assumed to be fictional. Experts in developed countries are making great efforts to find a mechanism and ways to fight against scientific fraud. Thus, German Science Association (DFG) has formed a committee which investigate anonymous reports about possible scientific fraud. DFG spokesman Mr. Mark Finetti concluded that in the past 15 years, the committee reviewed 500 suspected cases of scientific fraud, but in most it was a case of sloppy and incomplete citations or plagiarism. According to his words: "Serious manipulations with data are rare" and the "Frauds in the science are not a mass phenomenon".

Due to the more frequent detection of plagiarized articles, raises the question how to stop this negative and pervasive trend. Thus, for example, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Macedonia launched a useful portal for detecting plagiarized articles and created system which enables easy and efficient detection of plagiarized articles that have already been published. Through this system students, researchers and scientists can easily test their master, doctoral and other types of scientific papers. (<http://www.academlink.com/blog/view/19305/sistem-analiza-i-pronalaznja-plagiranij-radova>). Unfortunately in Bosnia and Herzegovina such mechanisms does not yet exist nor will be set up in the near future. That is because this is not in the interest of numerous "quasi researchers" who acquired their academic titles and titles in suburban universities (of which more than any other accredited), and then on that basis of gained functions receive variety of benefits.

So, definitely the problem of plagiarism in the existing relations and conditions is globally unsolvable and all attempts to rigorously and dramatically sanction those who make repeated violations and unethical practices have remained barren (1, 2, 15-20). The perpetrators of ethical violations are aware of the fact that academic bodies/associations like COPE, ICMJE etc. are powerless, because the draconian penalties cannot be on their side. Colleges and other research institutions from which are coming potential scientists due to all well known reasons (not getting in conflict with the bearers of academic political function by proclaiming them as violators) rarely use drastic measures such as exclusion from the academic community, or at least excommunicate them.

Finally, I must mention that one of the key reasons for the increased plagiarism in the academic community is the result of what has brought us the imposed Bologna concept of education (1, 2). This concept, among other things, requires from scientists to publish certain number of articles to fulfill one of the key conditions—and that

is "advancing in the elections to academic titles" without delay, which is, in my opinion, "one of the cardinal shortcomings of this concept or model, with unforeseeable consequences for the quality, especially in higher education. This is particularly not feasible in countries and areas where for the scientific research a single euro is not allocated, and it is impossible to have some quality research results in order to evoke interest even within the local academic community, not to mention the international one (2, 16).

The example of unethical behavior from the beginning of this text can, but does not need to have reasons in line with mine above presented personal observation, but such cases should be disclosed, prevented and sanctioned without dilemma. The mere fact that there is some knowledge about it, can prevented some new unethical practices in the future.

Therefore, the controversial article "Urinary Biomarkers of Acute Kidney Injury in Patients with Liver Cirrhosis" written by Ahmed Annas Qasem et al. published in *Med Arh* 2014 Apr; 68 (2): 132-136 has been retracted and sent to "Retraction Watch".

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: NONE DECLARED.

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