

## View Point: Retraction is a Pain but Scientific Misconduct is a Crime!

Medical science changes very fast and to keep up with the change and spread its meaning the scientific publishing is the best tool as it always remains in the current perspective of the ongoing research. But the lee side of this is there is always a fear of misconduct or fraud getting a let in and it has also been a consistent phenomenon with almost all the journals. When faced with such situations the editors have a responsibility to retract such literature and a retraction note becomes very important because the researchers and readers of such articles have every right to know the exact reasons so that further citations can be avoided. Annals of Cardiac Anaesthesia (ACA) have not remained untouched with this scourge and this issue includes retractions of the two articles.

The first one is the editorial<sup>[1]</sup> by Dr. Poonam Malhotra Kapoor, written when she was holding the editor's post of this journal. This article glorified the then editor undermining the efforts of the past editors in nurturing the ACA. In this process of self-glorification a graph was presented that actually showed wrong statistics. None other than the then president of Indian Association of Cardiothoracic Vascular Anaesthesiologists (IACTA) brought that out for everybody's knowledge. IACTA being the owners of ACA and having zero tolerance for fraud debated the issue in its annual meeting in 2017 in Pune, India. The prompt action taken by IACTA was to constitute a committee that looked into the whole matter. In the mean time, the then editor sensing trouble responded in her own way by putting up an erratum<sup>[2]</sup> to her above mentioned editorial in the next issue of ACA. The nominated committee came to conclusion and gave the verdict that the editorial being full of misinformation should be retracted. IACTA general body meeting in its Annual conference at Hyderabad, India in 2018 ratified the committee's proposal and the process of retraction of the article and the erratum had been done in this issue of ACA.

The second one is an original article published in ACA. "Is endothelin gene polymorphism associated with postoperative atrial fibrillation in patients undergoing coronary artery bypass grafting?" authored by Ira Dhawan, Minati Choudhury, Milind P Hote, Anushree Gupta, Poonam Malhotra, Kalaivani V Mani DOI: 10.4103/aca.ACA\_264\_16; published in volume 20 of 2017 at page numbers 341-347.<sup>[3]</sup> One of the coauthors, surprisingly, sent me an email mentioning her extreme astonishment when she found her name as one of the authors of this original article, whereas, she herself has no knowledge of contributing in any way to that article or any research that resulted in that paper. She also raised issues about the ethical clearance from Institute Ethics

Committee and also about the financial support for such kind of study. I, the present editor of ACA rechecked the copyright form submitted by the corresponding author for the article and that document showed signatures of the complainant. On further enquiry it came to the fore that that coauthor has never signed that form and those signatures were fraudulently created in her name. I sent an email to both, the first author and the corresponding author of the above mentioned article, for their answers to the raised allegation of including fraud signatures on the copyright form, about ethical clearance number from IEC and the source of funding of that project but to no avail. There had been a complete silence on their part on these issues. The allegations were serious and "No Answer" doctrine of corresponding author made matters worse, and therefore keeping with the journal policy and its written guidelines such action could not be tolerated and there was no other option in front of the editorial office but to retract the article.

This issue of ACA had also published an editorial on fraud in publishing by Dr. PK Neema, one of the past editors of ACA<sup>[4]</sup>. He had very rightly and exhaustively elaborated on this menace quoting some landmark retractions in the history of medical publishing. In the last paragraph he also suggests that only retraction is probably not the answer to the cure and there must be certain harsh measures against the fraudsters. I think this becomes very important in preserving the sanctity of the truth that is at the heart and soul of doing any research as the research in the form of published paper gets into the databases of various indexing agencies to live for a lifetime. In the process these papers may divert the process of patient management or the further research that may prove to be a dead end ultimately or may harm the patients in the long run. They can cause more and sometimes irreparable damage. In this context the editors apart from following the good practices in scientific publishing, have really very tough task to point out fraud unless some good Samaritans wake up and help them out as it happened in the above two examples. I think, ultimately the onus lies on the institutions where such researchers work to take notice of these frauds and chalk out ways for actions against them that may work as deterrent for others not to tread that path.

In the end I will salute IACTA the owners of ACA for its mercurial actions against fraud that will keep ACA as a beacon of good and responsible publishing and hope for generations. And I extend an advice to all the future authors of scientific papers to read existing good documents in the world literature on responsible publishing.

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