

## EDITORIAL

# Integrity in Science

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Recently, the popular media has criticized medical journals for not disclosing conflicts of interest prompting some journals to specify instances where these *potential* conflicts of interests were disclosed (Goldsmith, 2006). Other instances such as plagiarism and “double publishing” of data have occurred recently in many journals. These blatant misconducts in science, although in the minority, have created a pall over all of the quality articles published each year. Unfortunately, this puts the onus on us, as credible scientists, to further prove the value and integrity of our scientific products. This recent focus on scientific integrity or scientific misconduct prompted this editor to seriously consider addressing this topic for the readers of the *Journal of Exposure Science and Environmental Epidemiology*.

“Scientific integrity” can mean many things. Most people would consider plagiarism or forging scientific data as breaches of scientific integrity. However, I think scientific integrity transcends this narrow definition. In my opinion, scientific integrity means fully disclosing all potential areas of bias, curtailing blatant scientific misconduct, and our mandate, as scientists, to ensure quality science is published in our journals. To ensure that all of the science published in *JESEE* is purely transparent, we have introduced new guidelines in which authors must disclose all funding sources and potential conflicts of interests in the “acknowledgment” section of each manuscript. I should reinforce that the existence of a potential conflict does not translate into poor science. The transparency in funding and agency affiliation only allows the reader to consider all possibilities when judging the merit of the paper. I whole-heartedly believe that most scientists strive to present unbiased data and interpret the data fairly; however, often perspectives can be overlooked by these scientists’ experiences. Thus, full disclosure of potential conflicts will allow the reader to possibly recognize alternative perspectives that may instigate constructive and engaging debate on the subject.

Another part of scientific integrity involves scientific misconduct. To me, this is the most egregious disservice to science. Scientific misconduct includes falsifying data and plagiarism. We can all recall at least one instance in the last decade in which scientific data were falsified to produce the conclusion the authors wanted. In addition, data have been manipulated or misinterpreted to support an *a priori* conclusion. We are fortunate that these instances are few and far between; however, with the burgeoning pressure to produce results and manuscripts, some unfortunate scientists find themselves in a situation where they feel they must abuse the system in order to advance their careers. I was personally a victim of plagiarism in the most blatant form last year. A paper I published in a reputable journal

in the mid-nineties was reproduced exactly — data and wording were exact with the exception of about five words — in an obscure journal. Some scientists jokingly told me that “imitation was the sincerest form of flattery” — I felt many feelings, but flattery was not among them. This incident made me feel violated and unprotected. I wonder how many incidents like this have gone undiscovered. As a result of my personal experience, the scientists who abused the scientific process have been banned from publishing in two journals, but not the obscure journal in which they plagiarized my article. I hope this will change. We, as scientists, should strive to correct these misconducts, and I will compel the journal in which my article was plagiarized, and perhaps the university where the authors are employed, to take some action. I do this so we can try to preserve the integrity of our science and so we can trust the research that is published in peer-reviewed journals.

Lastly, I want to address the issue of peer-review. As you all know, this is the cornerstone for ensuring we publish only the best quality science. I appreciate all of the time and energy our reviewers have invested in the quality and growth of the journal. It is not easy to volunteer your precious time when you have such full schedules, but it is a necessity for good science. I think one key to the continued success of the journal is to ensure we have quality reviews in a timely fashion. We all look to journals that can provide constructive reviews in a timely fashion so that our work is neither outdated nor forgotten. I feel privileged to work with our strong reviewer base and hope we continue to consider the timeliness and thoroughness of our reviews as our commitment to science.

As Editor of *JESEE*, I remain committed to ensuring quality and transparency in our articles with the immense cooperation of our authors and the committed and quality reviews of our peer-review panels. I would also like to acknowledge the tireless input and work of the editorial board. My hope for our journal is that we can overcome the dark cloud of scientific misconduct that sometimes plagues other journals and continue our long-standing tradition of promoting integrity in science.

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## Reference

Goldsmith L.A. Conflict of Interest and the JID. *J Invest Dermatol* 2006; 126: 2147–2148.