State of the journal: 2019

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Periodically, I have written a “State of the Journal” editorial to inform our readers of the major activities of the journal and to publically thank our external reviewers for their efforts in refereeing many of the manuscripts submitted for consideration of publication. The reviewers remain anonymous to individual manuscript authors, but this public listing is our way of highlighting their importance in maintaining the journal’s excellence and of individually thanking them for their efforts.

On December 31, I will retire as the Editor in Chief and be replaced by Patrick Gallagher from Yale. I have served as the Editor in Chief since 2001 and have enjoyed the role greatly. Dr. Gallagher was chosen after an international search by a committee consisting of representatives from our two sponsoring professional societies, the publisher, and myself. Dr. Gallagher is Professor of Pediatrics, Genetics and Pathology, Yale. He regularly attends Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) and is recognized as an outstanding clinician and teacher. He has published over 200 peer-reviewed articles largely in fetal and neonatal aspects of hematology and genetics. He supervises an NIH-funded research laboratory at Yale focusing primarily on genetics, genomics, and developmental biology of inherited blood disorders. He also participates in translational studies of infectious diseases of the neonate and various quality improvement initiatives in the NICU. He teaches trainees at all levels, from undergraduate, medical and graduate students to senior postdoctoral fellows and sabbatical faculty. I am enthusiastic about his appointment and see it as the next step in advancing the journal.

The progress of the journal has been largely due to the strong support by our contributors. Compared with 2001, the annual number of new articles received in the journal

has quadrupled. Several years after I began, the number of issues published per year increased from 8 to 12. By 2017 we doubled the number of original articles per issue compared with 2011 despite discontinuing the popular case report series, which in 2014 had contributed to 25% of all the new articles received. Our Impact Factor varies from year to year but generally puts us around the top third of journals in the pediatric category. The Eigenfactor (similar to the Impact Factor, but adjusted for the impact of the citing journals) for 2017 is tied for #18, ranking among the 124 pediatric journals evaluated by Web of Science. We certainly appreciate the increasing support from all our contributors who continue to provide high-quality manuscripts.

One aspect of past editorials has been a brief discussion of our responses to the “hot” issues relating to the process of publishing original research. In the last editorial (2016), I discussed about bogus or fabricated reviews of articles and aspects of paying for open access (OA) as it relates to the *Journal of Perinatology*. I tried to assure our readers that we have safeguards to prevent fabricated reviews and that OA had no role in the editorial decision process. During the past few years, several aspects of plagiarism have occurred that I believe need the attention of our readership so that they may avoid those issues.

Plagiarism is defined as replicating the works by others, without proper attribution of that work. That replication may also be of one’s own work in which it is described as “self plagiarism”. The problem with plagiarism is that it is considered intellectual dishonesty (an ethical issue) or copyright violation (a legal issue). In either case it is to be avoided at all costs. In scientific reporting, intellectual dishonesty can be career ending because it demonstrates that a researcher’s scientific results are not dependable, potentially much more significant than violating copyright laws. In order to detect the possibility of duplications in manuscripts about to be published, in the final stage of being accepted for publication, each manuscript is sent through an on-line computer program (“CrossCheck/Ithenticate”) that compares the manuscript to all the material that has been

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published and placed onto widely distributed electronic resources (e.g., the worldwide web). CrossCheck highlights short and long sequences of duplicated words that it finds in that database and reports a percentage of words in the text of the manuscript being considered that appear to be duplicated or paraphrased. When we get the report back from CrossCheck an editor manually reviews all manuscripts that score above 25% “duplications”. Mostly, the identified text consists of a few words that are frequently “stock phrases”, institution names, etc. Stock phrases include things like disclaimers or commonly used descriptors (such as “Supported by the National Institutes of Health and the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health ...” or “...defined as presence of grade III or IV intracranial hemorrhage or cystic periventricular leukomalacia...”). None of these are considered duplicates because they are so common. However, when multiple sentences or even whole paragraphs are identified then we investigate further. Recently, CrossCheck identified several manuscripts that were examples of clear plagiarism. One was an attempt by a research group to publish a fifth article that used tables and text in each of the four prior articles. Another example was a manuscript that had several duplicated paragraphs and a large table with identical results from an unreferenced publication. These were two clear examples of intentional plagiarism. We respond to such examples using processes defined by the Committee on Publication Ethics [1].

However, we have now also seen examples of three ways in which authors, perhaps unintentionally, plagiarize the work of themselves or others. First is a research group repeating the exact description of methods used in previous research publications from their group. Many people, including me, consider this a “minor sin” as there are only so many ways one can restate the same techniques. However, the original verbiage is likely under copyright, and thus this is a legal issue. I prefer simply that authors using same or similar methods should simply state “We have described the methods earlier (ref no.)”. That can be followed by a brief description and/or simply the aspects unique to the present report. That saves print space and cost, and the readers can find the actual methods if they need.

A second insidious, but possibly accidental, method of plagiarizing your work or that of others is when writing a

manuscript (we have seen this many times especially in reviews) one copies and pastes a paragraph or two from a report fully, intending to rewrite it later. However, when revising the manuscript the copied words are so well written (after all they were published!) that one overlooks the needed alterations. The message is never copy and paste published material into your work that you intend to publish. Even paraphrasing such paragraphs by deleting or replacing a few words is identified by CrossCheck.

The above two examples of preventable plagiarism should be known to experienced authors. However, we identified recently a third way in which a naive author was ensnared into an unintentional duplication of an entire manuscript. This happened when he was solicited by one of the new OA journals to submit an article. The author emailed in a manuscript and it was accepted without further review. The manuscript was processed and published and then the publisher demanded payment. Unaware of the publication of the manuscript, the author refused payment and requested that the paper not be published. Having no further correspondence (except further bills) they assumed it was not published and sent the manuscript to *Journal of Perinatology* for evaluation. Our reviewers felt that it was a fine manuscript and advised publication with suggested manuscript changes. On resubmission, we sent the revised manuscript through CrossCheck and it received an 80% duplication score. We rejected the manuscript and, following Committee on Publication Ethics recommendations [1], requested the institution to investigate the apparent self-plagiarism. The institutional investigation identified the above sequence of events and concluded that the original publication was unintended by the authors. This could have been avoided by the authors assuring that they were submitting via a formal and identified process that they understood.

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1. Committee on Publication Ethics. COPE statement on “How should editors respond to plagiarism?” http://publicationethics.org/files/u7141/Discussion%20document_0.pdf.

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