

News notes

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Some of these items are taken from the EASE Journal Blog (<http://esebookshelf.blogspot.com>) where full URLs may be found

Legal challenge to clinical trial publication

Richmond Pharmacology, a clinical trial company, has launched a judicial review against the UK Health Research Authority, challenging that organisation's requirements for the publication of historical clinical trials, and in so doing asking the courts to decide on a fundamental principle about clinical trial registration. The AllTrials (alltrials.net) campaign has intervened and submitted evidence. The case continues.

ORCID uptake

ORCID (orcid.org), the researcher identifier system, has agreed consortium membership arrangements with institutions in Italy and the UK. Italy is implementing ORCID nationally via ANVUR (National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes) and CRUI (the Conference of Italian University Rectors) and it will link with IRIDE (Italian Research Identifier for Evaluation) Project. In the UK, ORCID is being offered to universities through a consortium brokered by Jisc Collections (jisc-collections.ac.uk).

Citing peer review articles

F1000 (f1000.com) and ORCID (orcid.org) have collaborated with CASRAI (Consortia Advancing Standards in Research Administration Information; casrai.org) on a standard way of citing peer review activities. A working group devised a standard data profile that includes four main elements: (1) person (with identifier) who performed the review and is being credited with it; (2) review description (with identifier), unless blinded; (3)

subject of the review (the paper, grant etc), unless blinded; (4) organisation that recognises the peer review (publisher, association or funder). You can read more about the specifications on the ORCID blog (orcid.org/blog; 18 May 2015), where you can also find out how organisations such as F1000, Europe PubMedCentral, and the American Geophysical Union are implementing it.

Open science: special issues

The June 2015 issue of *EuroScientist* focuses on open science, with a series of articles mapping out a future where "the term open science will become redundant as all science will be that way." You can read the issue at www.euroscientist.com/science-2-0. A forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology* will also include a series of articles on open medical science, including Ben Goldacre and Tracey Brown's "Fixing flaws in science must be professionalised." (www.jclinepi.com/inpress; 3 July 2015)

Conflict on conflict of interest

A series of articles in the *New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM)*, supported by the journal's editor in chief, asked whether conflict of interest policies had gone too far in their attempts to reduce the influence of industry on medical publications. Three former editors at the journal, writing in *The BMJ* (2015;350:h2942), described the *NEJM* articles as "seriously flawed and inflammatory" and expressed the need to "move forward, not backward". *The BMJ* itself has tightened its policy, with a 'zero tolerance' policy for educational articles.

Are we asking peer reviewers the right questions?

Do peer reviewers and editors agree on what tasks are most important when conducting peer review of clinical trials? That was the question explored by a team of French researchers, who gathered the tasks expected of peer reviewers from a large number of journals and they surveyed 200 peer reviewers

(*BMC Medicine* 2015;13:158). They concluded that the tasks identified as important by peer reviewers (tasks relating to methodology, statistics, results) were "not congruent with the tasks most often requested by journal editors in their guidelines to reviewers."

Chocolate sting paper

The latest hoax scientific article designed to highlight flaws in science communication was effective but was also subject to criticism for its ethics. American journalist John Bohannon, in collaboration with German journalists, conducted an elaborate hoax based on a real clinical trial, purporting to show that eating chocolate could help with weight loss. The data was weak and easily massaged to show an effect, and the paper was promptly published by a poor-quality journal without peer review and press released to gain substantial media interest. The full details are on the io9 website (io9.com; 27 May 2015). Hilda Bastian of PubMed Health looks carefully at the ethics of such an approach on her Absolutely Maybe blog (blogs.plos.org/absolutely-maybe).

Changes at the Medical Journal of Australia

In May 2015, the Editor of the *Medical Journal of Australia*, Professor Stephen Leeder, was fired following a disagreement with the Australasian Medical Publishing Company (a subsidiary of the Australian Medical Association) about the journal's future. The majority of the journal's editorial advisory committee also resigned in protest, and a Friends of the MJA group (friendsofmja.net.au) was formed in response. The group is calling for Leeder's reinstatement and a rethink on the journal's future. The debate is highlighting the complex relationship between journal owners, publishers and editors.

Pay-what-you-want publishing

Publisher Thieme (www.thieme.com) is collaborating with two

German universities to explore a trial of a pay-what-you-want model for academic journals. The model will be tested on a new open-access journal, *The Surgery Journal*. Following acceptance, authors can pay an article-processing charge that they is most suitable.

Journal editors facing new ethical challenges

The publication of a paper reporting gene editing in human embryos provoked wide debate on the ethics of the science. The paper, by Puping Liang et al, was eventually published in *Protein & Cell* (2015;6:363) but had been rejected by both *Science* and *Nature* due to ethical concerns, as reported in *Nature* (28 April 2015). In an accompanying editorial, *Protein & Cell's* managing editor explained that they published the paper to “sound an alarm” about the work, adding that the journal did not necessarily endorse or encourage such research. Nature Publishing Group is consulting on a policy on the issue.

COPE/DOAJ/OASPA/WAME transparency principles

Four organisations have collaborated to create a revised and updated set of criteria for transparency and best practice in scholarly publishing. The principles were originally developed in 2014 by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA) and the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) to aid in assessing journals or publishers applying for membership. The updated principles (published 22 June 2015) are available on the COPE website (publicationethics.org/resources/guidelines).

WAME statement on promoting global health

The World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) has issued a policy statement on the social responsibilities of medical journal editors to publish “whenever possible, research that furthers health worldwide”. The statement urges editors in all regions

to publish research addressing global health concerns and from authors in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). It also calls for editors to seek to provide free access and publication fee waivers, and proposes that editors in high-income countries should invite researchers from LMICs to participate on editorial boards and as peer reviewers and to submit editorials and commentaries on local context. The full statement, published on 31 May 2015, is available on the WAME website (www.wame.org/about/policy-statements).

Writing for readers or for citations?

The usual advice for any kind of scientific writing is to keep it short, to-the-point and readable. A recent analysis challenges this assumption for abstracts, if the aim is to obtain citations. The study, titled ‘Ten simple (empirical) rules for writing science’ (*PLOS Computational Biology* 2015;11:e1004205), found that articles with shorter abstracts, fewer sentences, or fewer common or easy generally had fewer citations than those with more wordy abstracts, and this applies across scientific disciplines. The authors suggest that this could be due to search engines favouring longer and more specific abstracts.

The Leiden Manifesto and the Metric Tide

The increasing use of metrics for the assessment of science has prompted the development of the Leiden manifesto to drive best practice and avoid misuse of metrics. Named after a conference held at the Centre for Science and Technology Studies in Lieden, Belgium, the manifesto offers a “distillation of best practice in metrics-based research assessment” The manifesto, published in *Nature* (2015;520:429), includes ten principles and some suggestions for next steps.

The UK Independent Review of the Role of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management, supported by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, has also published its findings. The review

found that metrics should support, not supplant, expert judgement and warned against overemphasis on poorly-designed indicators. The report, titled ‘The Metric Tide’, includes 20 recommendations and can be downloaded from the review team’s blog: responsiblemetrics.org. There will also be an annual Bad Metric award, and nominations are now open.

‘Kiloauthor’ biology paper

A paper on the evolution of the *Drosophila* genome by Wilson Leung et al, published in *G3: Genes Genomes Genetics* (4 March, 2015) attracted attention due the fact that the ‘et al’ included 1013 co-authors, most of them undergraduates. Some commentators wondered how that many authors could qualify for authorship according to the widely used definition proposed by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE). *Nature* reported (21 May 2015) how the paper’s senior author defended the paper, noting that all the students read, critiques and approved the manuscript. A 2012 paper on the Higgs boson, published in *Physics Letters B*, had 2932 authors.

Elsevier data sharing policy

Publisher Elsevier announced a new policy for sharing and hosting data in April 2015. The policy (described on the Elsevier Connect platform, www.elsevier.com/connect; 30 April 2015) was strongly criticised by the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) and the Confederation of Open Access Repositories (COAR), and they were subsequently joined by over 250 other organisations, including Creative Commons, the American Library Association, Research Libraries UK, and LIBER: European Research Library Association. The criticisms centred on the embargo periods and CC-BY-NC-ND licence option (see www.sparc.arl.org/news).

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