

DOCUMENT

Publication ethics policies for medical journals

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The World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) has recently released recommendations on Publication Ethics Policies for medical journals so that the publication process is thorough, objective and fair. The detailed guidelines are available at <http://wame.orgpubethicrecom.htm>. The association suggests that these recommendations be the base on which individual journals make their guidelines. However, these principles should either be published or maintained on the website so as to be accessible to readers, authors and reviewers.

Some facts that would interest readers of the *Indian Journal of Medical Ethics* are stated below.

Informed consent by participants should always be sought. If not possible, an institutional review board must decide if this is ethically acceptable. Journals should have explicit policies as to whether these review board approvals must be documented by the authors, or simply attested to in their cover letter, and how they should be described in the manuscript.

Who will be an author and in what sequence should be determined by the participants early in the research process to avoid disputes and misunderstandings which can delay or prevent publication of a paper.

Journals should discourage 'honorary' authorship. A conflict of interest results if some fact known to a participant in the publication process is revealed later and makes a reasonable reader feel misled or deceived (or an author, reviewer or editor feel defensive). Reviewers as well as editors of the journal should also be asked to routinely declare any similar competing interests, financial or non-financial, that might affect their work for the journal. If peer reviewers suspect misconduct, they should notify the editor in confidence. There should be an explicit written policy on the procedure that will be followed if an author appeals a decision.

Re-publication of a paper in another language, or simultaneously in multiple journals with different

audiences may be acceptable, provided there is full and prominent disclosure of its original source at the time of submission of the manuscript.

Authors should be discouraged from holding press conferences to publicise their abstract results, as these results are preliminary and generally the complete report has not yet undergone peer review. Journals should address these concerns in their formal policies on originality of submitted materials.

Self-plagiarism refers to authors' practice of using portions of their previous writings on the same topic in another publication, without citing it in quotes. If journals have developed a policy on this matter, it should be clearly stated to the authors.

Editorial decisions should not be influenced by advertising revenue or reprint potential. Commercial advertisements should not be placed adjacent to any editorial matter that discusses the advertised product nor adjacent to any article reporting research on the advertised product, nor should they refer to an article in the same issue in which they appear. Journals must have the right to refuse any advertisement.

Journals should have a clear policy on handling concerns or allegations about misconduct of authors, reviewers, editors and others to help protect the integrity of public scientific records. Journals should have an explicit policy describing the process by which they will respond to allegations of misconduct. Such allegations should be kept confidential.

Journals should have a policy describing their governance and relationship to the sponsoring society. The relationship between owners and editors-in-chief should be based on mutual respect and trust, and recognition of each other's authority and responsibilities because conflicts can damage the intellectual integrity and reputation of the journal, and its financial success.