

Scientific misconduct and breach of publication ethics

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Journals occasionally receive notification or allegations of scientific misconduct or breach of publication ethics. Sparked by recent high profile cases, institutions receiving federal funds must have investigatory policies and procedures to deal with faculty scientific misconduct.^{1–3} Journals, editors, and editorial boards are not investigational bodies. As stated by Stephen P. Lock, Editor Emeritus of the *British Medical Journal*, at a 1990 Office of Scientific Integrity Workshop: “We are the *JCI* (referring to the *Journal of Clinical Investigation*), not the FBI.”

Scientific misconduct includes “fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism,” and requires an “intent to deceive” by the authors.³ The AMA Manual of Style⁴ defines each of those terms, and separates out “omission” (defined as not presenting information that results in a distortion of truth) from the fabrication category. Honest error or differences in interpretation are not considered misconduct.

When *Neurology* suspects or receives an allegation of misconduct, we will notify the corresponding author’s institution (Dean and President), copying the funding agency when applicable. Also, when applicable, we will copy an authorized investigative agency: the Office of Research Integrity for studies funded by the Public Health Service (NIH or other PHS entities), the Offices of Inspectors General of the National Science Foundation or Department of Veterans Affairs, or private agencies. *Neurology* will not notify the authors unless the allegation is plagiarism of another’s written product. With fabrication and falsification, the institutions have the responsibility of notifying the authors.³

Consequences of misconduct. If *Neurology* identifies misconduct prior to publication, we will reject the manuscript, notify the previously mentioned institutions and agencies, and sanction the authors by not permitting them to submit papers to us for a specified length of time.

If an institution or investigative agency notifies us of misconduct involving a published article, we will retract the article in the form recommended by the International Committee of Medical Journal Edi-

tors,⁵ as occurred on two occasions during the 1987–1996 term of *Neurology*’s Editor-in-Chief.^{6,7} If there is credible evidence of misconduct, but it is insufficient to warrant a recommendation of retraction, *Neurology* may publish an “expression of concern,”⁵ with an explanation. Prior to publishing a retraction or expression of concern, *Neurology* will notify the author, institution, investigative agency, funding agency, and Library of Congress (to correct the electronic version of the article). We will not publish any explanation by the authors without a reply rebuttal by the institution or agency that performed the investigation.

Breach of publication ethics. These include failure to reveal financial conflicts of interest; redundant (also called fragmented, prior, dual, double, duplicate, or repetitive) publications^{5,8}; omitting a deserving author or adding a noncontributing author; misrepresenting publication status in the references (erroneously claiming that a paper is “in press”); and self-plagiarism without attribution.

In addition to possible sanctions, described above, and notification of the institutions and funding agencies, *Neurology* may take the following actions for these breaches:

Failure to reveal a financial conflict of interest will result in our publishing a “failure to disclose” that cites the omission.

Redundant publication will result in notification of the other journal, and retraction of the second article, if it has been published.

Omitting a deserving author or including a noncontributing author will require investigation by the authors’ institutions. *Neurology* will notify them of the allegation, and await their investigation. If the institution advises us that a deserving author was omitted or a noncontributing author was included in a published article, we will acknowledge the breach in an erratum, and advise the National Library of Medicine to correct the electronic versions of the publication.

Misrepresenting publication status may result in

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rejection of an unpublished manuscript, if the breach is deemed substantive.

Self-plagiarism without attribution is a copyright violation. *Neurology* will notify the holder of the original copyright.

Dealing with misconduct and ethical breaches is time-consuming and distracting for the Editor-in-Chief. For that reason, *Neurology* has created a position of Scientific Integrity Advisor to handle these issues. I, the former Editor-in-Chief of *Neurology* and a member of the Council of Science Editors and the World Association of Medical Editors, will be the journal's first Scientific Integrity Advisor.

We have incorporated our misconduct policies in our Information for Authors (available at <http://www.neurology.org>).

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