Ethics in Publishing
Really Matters

Presented to Students, Faculty, and Alumni
University of Alabama Huntsville, College of Nursing
February 21, 2019

Charon A Pierson, PhD, GNP, FAANP, FAAN
Editor Emeritus, Journal of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners
Secretary of COPE Council
Author
Reviewer
Reader
Editing and publishing consultant
No competing interests to declare

Today’s objectives
1. Describe three common ethics issues in scientific publishing that directly affect clinical decision making
2. Describe your understanding of the importance of the remedies used to correct the literature by the scientific community
3. Describe the differences between summary, synthesis, and quotations from literature and how that relates to scholarly work
4. Describe three essential elements of successful publishing of a paper developed from academic work

What is Publication Ethics?*
“A set of principles, policies and practices to ensure that published work can be trusted as a reliable source of evidence.”

- Issues arise at any stage of the publication lifecycle
- May involve anyone involved in any of the activities of publishing
- The reputation of published research as a reliable source of information relies on the integrity of the publication process
- Policies and practices associated with publication ethics have an important role to play
- Research ethics is central to publication ethics issues

COPE advocates Core Practices to ensure the integrity of scholarly publishing (https://publicationethics.org/core-practices)

COPE’s Mission:
Promoting integrity in research and its publication

COPE provides leadership in thinking on publication ethics, practical resources to educate and support members, and offers a professional voice in current debates.

Common ethical issues in publications
- Disputed authorship
- Compromised peer review
- Undeclared conflicts of interest
- Data fabrication/falsification
- Compromised data
- Plagiarism/duplicate publication
- Lack of patient consent
- Lack of study approval
- Exaggerated claims from findings

www.publicationethics.org
**Ethical issues compromise clinical decisions**

**Undeclared conflicts of interest**

“Conflict of interest (COI) exists when there is a divergence between an individual’s private interests (competing interests) and his or her responsibilities to scientific and publishing activities such that a reasonable observer might wonder if the individual’s behavior or judgment was motivated by considerations of his or her competing interests.”


**Examples of COI**

- Undeclared funding of a study where the funder benefits from good results or a competitor benefits from unfavorable results.
- Reviewer rejects paper conflicting with his/her own work in progress.
- Authors make claims of significance not supported by data to improve chance of publication.

**Data fabrication/falsification**

- Publication is making up data or results and rewriting or reporting them.
- Falsification is manipulating research materials, equipment, or procedures, or changing or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research record.
- Both constitute research misconduct.

**Data integrity**

- Requires that data for any project, paper, business, or research must be reliable and trustworthy throughout its lifecycle.

*according to the US Office of Research Integrity*

**Ethical issues compromise clinical decisions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unplanned changes to the work</th>
<th>Retraction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Countries in a dataset were swapped out</td>
<td>Remove and replace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The data from 2010 were used to create the graphs in 2015</td>
<td>Remove and replace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors received a payment for consulting activities</td>
<td>Remove and replace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The research was conducted in a non-compliant manner</td>
<td>Remove and replace</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fun facts about corrections & retractions**

**Case study published 1923 in Germany retracted in 2003**

Case study published in 1923 in Germany was retracted in 2003 due to concerns about the validity of the data.

**Errors in CMS database prompt authors to retract and replace paper on ACOs in JAMA journal**

Errors in the CMS database prompted authors to retract and replace a paper on Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs) in *The* *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

**Examples**

- Data from a previous study was used to create new graphs.
- The data was manipulated to support the study's conclusions.
- The research was conducted in a manner that did not comply with ethical standards.

**Examples**

- Scott S Ruben, MD
  - 23 retractions and challenges for fraudulent research on orthopedic post-management
- Paolo Macchiarini, MD
  - Lost job, research funding, publications for fraudulent research
- Brian Weir, M.D.
  - 17 studies on obesity and patient controls have been retracted for data fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism
- Errors in CMS database prompt authors to retract and replace paper on ACOs in *JAMA* journal
Nursing literature is not immune

Twenty-nine (29) retracted articles identified in the search from 1980-2017
First one in 2007 - represents 0.029% of all papers published in these journals since 2007
Duplicate publication was the most common reason for retraction (n = 18, 58%)
Mean number of citations manuscripts received after retraction was 7, the highest was 52
Most (n = 27, 93.1%) of the retracted papers are still available online (with a watermark indicating they are retracted)

What happens to retracted literature?
Published – 2013
Retracted – 2016
Closed before retraction – 1792
Closed after retraction – 79
Reason for retraction – protocol deviations in randomizations that accounted for the differences found in the study group

And then there’s the vaccine issue*

Finding corrections to the literature

Ethical Authorship

Finding Retractions

Finding Retractions

Ethical Authorship

*https://retractionwatch.com/the-retraction-watch-leaderboard/top-10-most-highly-cited-retracted-papers/*
Authors vs Contributors

Guidelines for authorship [www.icmje.org] under Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts
Made substantial intellectual contribution to the work
Takes responsibility for at least one portion of the work
Able to defend the entire work publicly
Guidelines for contributorship
https://casrai.org/credit/
Taxonomy of contributor roles for participants in scholarly outputs
Faculty-student collaborations
https://ori.hhs.gov/plagiarism-34

Who is not an author?
- Funder of the project
- Someone who collected data, including articles, patient samples, etc.
- Project supervisor (faculty advisor)
- Department Chair or Dean
- Computer/App programmer/Developer
- Statistician
- Laboratory director
- Data curator
- Graphic designer

Creating a thesis statement

“The greatest challenge to any thinker is stating the problem in a way that will allow a solution.”
- Bertrand Russell

Summarizing information:
- A cursory overview of distinct pieces of information to highlight important points.
- Retains point-of-view of the original author.

Synthesizing information:
- Reflects a deeper understanding of phenomena by highlighting important information from multiple sources in a logical fashion.
- Adds new insights from your own conclusions.

Very easy to plagiarize if you are simply summarizing.

Synthesizing research literature

Converting fruits into fruit smoothies*

*Metaphor suggested by University of Illinois Center for Teaching and Learning

You've finished your project – now what?

Doing research and communicating research are separate but equally important.

The Thesis Whisperer – just like the horse whisperer but with more pages
http://thesiswhisperer.com/

What can be published from your project?

Methods – including instrument development, novel methods or statistical analyses, or protocols for RCTs
Theory papers – often come after a series of projects
Systematic review of literature related to a succinct problem, question
Primary outcomes
Secondary analysis of the data
Qualitative findings if not part of the primary outcomes or case study
New clinical or technological innovation (i.e., App)
Editorial or opinion pieces – raising consciousness/awareness

Similarity report from iThenticate (49% excluding quotations) done on a submitted manuscript. Rejected by editor for plagiarism without peer review.
Writing the Article

YOUR FIRST JOB AS THE AUTHOR IS TO FIND AN APPROPRIATE JOURNAL, ONE THAT TARGETS THE AUDIENCE WHO NEEDS TO HEAR YOUR MESSAGE

Identify possible manuscripts/target journals

Consider carefully how many manuscripts you can ethically get out of your project
Plan for the major outcomes paper first
Select potential journals based on the mission and scope statements of the journals

A word about open access (OA)

OA is a business model for publishers
- Author pays publication fee (article processing charges) to make freely available
- There are many reputable OA journals but predatory publishers are serious problem
Subscription access is the traditional business model we know
- Subscribers and libraries pay for access to the journal content
Controlled circulation journals are traditionally sponsored by advertising
- Neither readers nor authors pay to publish or access
- Print copies sent to anyone and everyone
Find reputable journals at
- www.naepub.com Nurse Author & Editor Directory of Nursing Journals

Scholarly Writing

Objective and free of bias
Supported by evidence
Logical and reasoned
Synthesizes vs catalogues information
Uses precise language
Stands up to scrutiny of peers

Does not have to be boring

Complex ideas must be clearly expressed
Coherent structure makes reading easier
Well-crafted, jargon-free sentences
Engaging title and opening paragraph
Concrete language (use active verbs, nouns)
Referencing that does not get in the way
An interdisciplinary gaze (outside your field)
Creativity, imagination, passion

Adapted from Sword, H. Stylish Academic Writing
You’ve heard of Strunk & White – Meet Benjamin Dreyer
“...”

My take on that: A journal article is not a ramination on your vast knowledge of a topic.

When something can be read without effort, great effort has gone into its writing.
— Jardiel Poncela, Spanish playwright and novelist in the early 1900s

Write with the reader in mind

Busy clinicians
Busy researchers
Busy editors
Busy students
Busy reviewers

Reporting Guidelines

https://www.equator-network.org/

What do editors want?

Accurate information
- New information – update, algorithm, new guideline, tips, new research
  - Information and research that moves the profession forward
- Written in an interesting and grammatically correct manner
- Scholarly
  - Current primary source material for references
- Editors know their audience
  - Clinically relevant
  - Politically relevant

What do editors rarely see?

Evidence that authors:
- Read the author guidelines.
- Follow the author guidelines.

They are actually rules – not just suggested guidelines!
MODELS OF PEER REVIEW

- Single-blind peer review
- Double-blind peer review
- Open internal peer review
- Open external (published) peer review

Reviews – the good, the bad, the ugly

What you should expect from reviewers:
- An indication of what the reviewer understood from your manuscript
- Constructive criticism about how to improve your manuscript
- Possibly some sources for you to consider

What you should NOT expect from reviewers:
- A complete re-write of your paper
- Uncivil comments
- Unhelpful comments such as: "nice job" "good read" "needs to start over"

Reviewer Guide

Reviewing manuscripts is a good way to:
1. Contribute to the scholarly community
2. Learn about the publication process
3. Enhance your skills in writing and research

Publication and Scientific Misconduct are Serious Issues

Not worth the consequences
- If (when) you are caught, your reputation will be ruined
- You could be investigated by Office of Research Integrity
- You could face jail time
- You could lose your professional license to practice
- Your degree could be revoked

What makes an article important?

"Every experiment is a conversation with a prior experiment, and every new theory a refutation of the old."

Siddhartha Mukherjee
The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer
Takeaways from today

Ethical conduct in research and publication are the foundation of scientific knowledge.

Before you write take time to absorb and digest the essential information you need.

Follow the instructions.

Use structure to your advantage.

Question findings that don’t make sense to you.

Case 1 – Legitimate Authorship

The head of a research grant is the first author on a manuscript explaining the methods of an intervention study in medication adherence. Several graduate students are funded on the grant as research assistants. The senior research assistant student on the grant is named as a second author on the paper, but no other students are included in the author list. A new research assistant just entering the doctoral program is asked by the first author to create a graphic depicting the flow of subjects through the project. When the manuscript is published, the junior student assistant makes a complaint that she should have been an author because she created the graphic.

Who is a legitimate author on this manuscript? Why?

Case 2 – Compromised systematic review

A group of authors conduct a systematic review and their paper is published in a ranking journal (it has an impact factor). Over the first year, the review is cited 12 times in other scholarly papers. A high-profile retraction of one of the largest clinical trials included in this review is published after this first year. The retraction was published due to findings of research misconduct—the researchers were not blinded to which subjects received the actual drug and which ones received placebo. The authors of the systematic review want to know if this invalidates their work.

What should the authors of the systematic review do?

Case 3 – Lack of patient consent

A student, in collaboration with a faculty member, submitted a manuscript to a journal on an unusual case encountered in the clinic. Some of the details were changed to protect the patient’s identity, but it was impossible to completely disguise everything. There was no mention of informed consent of the patient and family for publication of the case. The editor contacted the authors and asked for informed consent from the patient. The authors responded that the patient had since died and it was impossible to obtain a consent. They argue that because the patient was dead, there would be no harm to anyone, given that most of the details had been changed anyway.

Does it matter? Should the paper be published? Is the editor being difficult?

Case 4 – QI project controversy

A DNP student conducted a quality improvement project at a Native American Health Clinic, housed on tribal lands. The requirement for the student’s graduation was submission of a paper suitable for publication to a journal. At the end of the semester, the student was advised by the clinic that data from the project could not be included in any potential publication. Faculty attempted to intervene with the agency to assist the student, but were unsuccessful. The student was eventually allowed to present her findings orally to her committee, but nothing beyond that.

How could this situation have been avoided? Did the agency have the right to restrict publication of potentially useful information with their policies?

References and Resources


www.naepub.com houses the directory of nursing journals and many more resources for writing.

http://nursing.utah.edu/journalwriting

Free online course on writing for publication.