

Letter to the Editor

The Role of Publishers in Prevention of Misconducts in Medical Research: Springer and BioMed Central, Victim or Culprit

Dear Editor,

Recently, an interesting article entitled “ Publisher pulls 58 articles by Iranian scientists over authorship manipulation “ was published in the Nature’s News and Comment by the E. Callaway that reported the serious misconduct by the group of the Iranian researchers, resulting in BioMed Central (BMC) and Springer, two of the world’s famous publishers, retracting 58 article authored by 282 Iranian-based researchers across seven journals.¹

However, based on the available evidence, it seems that this fraud was conducted by a small group of the Iranian scientists, but after deep contemplation on this evidence and reviewing the “Journal’s Policies” and “Instructions for Authors” sections, the important role of the editors of both BMC and Springer should also be considered.

First, all Springer and BMC journals are members of Cross Check’s plagiarism detection initiative and all the submitted manuscripts are checked for any plagiarism.^{2,3} Hence, the important question is, “if major plagiarism was detected in the mentioned manuscripts before or during the peer review process, why did the editors not reject the manuscripts or ask the authors to properly paraphrase? Was checking for plagiarism done correctly?”

Second, all journals claimed that in some retracted articles, there was evidence of authorship manipulation. Since journals have adopted strict rules against changing authorship, expressing explicitly that there can be no change in authorship once a manuscript is accepted, why and how were the changes in authorship made in these journals?

Third, in some retracted articles, peer review manipulation was reported, particularly use of fake emails to real scientists. Indeed, the journals asked the authors to suggest potential reviewers; however, whether or not to consider these reviewers is at the Editor’s discretion. Consequently, another important question

arises: do the journal’s editors carefully choose proper reviewers?

Finally, with regard to this issue of misconducts that cannot be ignored, and confirming this belief that the peer review process is based on trust, it is important to note that the journals and their editors should make the review process more precise and more closely controlled.

Although both publishers have accepted their responsibilities in the occurrence of this violation, considering what was mentioned earlier, it seems that the publishers are not only victims but may also be the main culprit.

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