

Letter to the Editor

Plagiarism — Is there a solution?

Madam, The world of science is bloomed by vast literature on virtually every scientific topic that comes to our mind. Unfortunately, this dissemination of knowledge has a few hurdles to its progress. Since the academic scientific enterprise rewards those with the most publications, there is tremendous pressure to generate voluminous output. In doing so, scientists often fall prey to fabrication (invention of data or cases), falsification (willful distortion of data) and plagiarism (copying of ideas, data, or words without attribution), which are serious forms of scientific misconduct.^{1,2} In this way, the image of scientists as objective seekers of truth is periodically jeopardized by the discovery of such scientific frauds. Increasing evidence, however, suggests that known frauds are just the "tip of the iceberg", and that many cases are never discovered.³

Authorship of scientific papers is one of the most valuable currencies for scientists and engineers, and is an asset not only for climbing the corporate or academic ladder, but also most importantly to secure funding for academic laboratories.⁴ One of the fundamental rules that most scientists learn about publishing is the widely adopted Ingelfinger rule, named for a former editor of the New England Journal of Medicine. He declared that his journal would not consider a manuscript for publication if it was submitted simultaneously elsewhere or previously published in similar form. Plagiarism and covert multiple publications

of the same data are thus considered unacceptable by all standards.² Duplicate publication may be useful to provide wider access to the scientific community or to report important updates to surveys or clinical trials, but publications that simply reproduce a previous work with virtually identical results and conclusions often lack the novelty to justify additional publication.⁵ Such frauds need to be picked up and dealt with accordingly.

Identification of duplicated data in publications is not an easy task by any means. Certain softwares like Déjà vu⁵ are available that can assist in picking up such scientific frauds. Also, readers should be strongly encouraged to report any such occurrence to the editors so that the respective articles could be removed. The authors should be asked to give an explanation, and if they fail to do so, their names should be reported to their respective institutions so that necessary actions could be taken. Every attempt should be made to minimize plagiarism, and authors should understand that in the long run, it only threatens the confidence in scientific integrity.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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