

## *Editorial*

### **Fraud is fraud**

A scientific journal is the link between the author, or producer, and the reader, or consumer, where new ideas, clinical experience, research or material of educational value are reported. The role of the Editorial Board is to select submitted papers for publication and to try and guarantee that the information contained is reliable.

In our increasingly competitive world, the pressure for publication is becoming one of the main burdens for scientists and medical doctors, because many institutions, universities and hospital judge fitness for promotion by the number and quality of papers written. Publications are often rated by the impact factor of the journal in which they appear. It can be disputed whether this practice is desirable and just, but as long as it exists authors will be pressured into submitting papers for publication.

Editorial Boards are increasingly worried by fraudulent practices which are often difficult to detect. There are different degrees of fraud: many cannot be considered as true fraud because they do not imply a deliberate intention to deceive, but they do misrepresent facts. An example is the reporting of results of hip arthroplasties, where a follow-up of at least 5 to 10 years is desirable. It is wrong to describe a series as having an average follow-up of 10 years, when the range runs from 2–15 years.

The tendency is now to require authors to state whether series of patients have been studied prospectively or retrospectively, if they are consecutive cases or if they have been randomised and by what method.

Expression of results is another source of serious bias. The use of well established point sys-

tems to assess results is often misleading, and the addition of other variables such as pain, motion and function in order to improve the results is not acceptable. Strict comparison between recorded data is required. Patient satisfaction is now accepted as a valid method of assessment and is used increasingly.

Discussion should clearly state which statements are made as a result of clear observation and which are mere speculation.

Only the bibliography appearing in the text can be quoted, and it is assumed that the author has actually read it!

Some journals also require a written statement to say whether their work has been sponsored by a commercial interest and if financial reward has accrued.

Outright fraud, although infrequent, is difficult to detect. There are reports of falsified illustrations and the possibility of manipulating computed digitised radiographs is awesome [1].

Intellectual honesty is of paramount importance if the reader of a scientific journal is to rely on what is written in the text. This editorial has been prompted by the recent publication of a paper simultaneously in two English language journals [2, 3]. The first author had signed a statement for each journal stating "that the article is original, and that it is not under consideration by another journal and that the material has not been previously published."

Original papers represent most of the material in a journal and have not been previously published. It is unethical to submit the same papers simultaneously to more than one journal. However, some journals accept papers that have been published in

regional journals or even national ones of small circulation, often in a different language. In these cases, the original paper should be credited and an authorisation to reproduce illustrations is required.

## References

1. Orozco R (1995) Letter to editor. Computer imaging. Int Orthop (SICOT) 19: 261–262
2. Bülow JU et al. (1996) Uncemented total hip replacement and thigh pain. Int Orthop (SICOT) 20: 65–69
3. Bülow JU et al. (1996) Arch Orthop Trauma Surg 115: 190–194

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Editor