EDITORIAL

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Redundant publication

Two years ago the former editor of this journal wrote an editorial on redundant publication [4]. The reason was that a submitted and published article in *International Orthopaedics* [1] was shortly afterwards published in *Archives of Orthopaedic and Trauma Surgery*. Both journal editors were informed and, when checking in MEDLARS, one will now learn that the redundant articles have been classified as a *duplicate publication journal article*, whatever citation is used.

In 1992 it was estimated that duplicate and redundant publication might account for up to 13% of published papers [5]. If this figure is correct, most editors will probably agree that today's figure is even higher. The reasons are manifold. Some authors think their results are so important that a major information outbreak is necessary, while other authors try to publish as many publications as possible, thinking "great is good". The latter might be seen in communities with a high degree of competition for academic positions. Usually editors (and readers) will judge the article by its content and ask themselves whether two articles give more information than one.

If a journal adheres to the "Vancouver Declaration on uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals" as does *International Orthopaedics*, one would imagine that authors might be aware of the duplication problem. Among the requirements it is stated, that "when submitting a paper, the author should always make a full statement to the editor about all submissions and previous reports that might be regarded as redundant or duplicate publication of the same or very similar work". It might be acceptable to publish a report of similar work in a national journal, but it is still imperative that the editor of the international journal is alerted by the corresponding author. The fact that the work has already been published should be clearly stated and referenced. When there is any doubt, authors should submit with their manuscript any other papers possibly representing duplications or fragmentation of results, – also because a new publication using the same illustrations might infringe international copyright law.

Authors come and go, whereas editors reside for a longer period of time. It has for that reason become the policy of many international journals to ask authors to submit a signed covering letter with the submitted manuscript. The content of the covering letter used in *International Orthopaedics* can be read in the *Instructions for Authors*, which is printed in each issue of the journal, or to be found on the web site (<http://www.sicot.dk>).

By signing and submitting a covering letter the author declares:

That the article is original

That it is not under consideration by another journal

That this material has not been previously published

This statement cannot be mistaken. If the editorial process is not delayed and publication takes place within 3–6 months, one would imagine that unintended duplicate publication should be rare – or at least a new and trusting editor would think so.

Nevertheless, it has come to light that yet another report published in *International Orthopaedics* in 1997 [2] was published in a national orthopaedic journal 2 years earlier [3]. One might argue that this is not a duplicate or redundant publication. In deciding whether reports are redundant or not, one might ask if the reports present new data and information or if they disclose only little or no new data in comparison with the first published report. In the cited reports the patient population is the same, the results are equal and even some of the illustrations are similar. No reference is given to the first published article.

Mistaken or not – a redundant publication is not good practice; it is misleading and sends wrong messages to the international community. It stigmatizes the authors and reflects poorly on the institution from which it comes. Finally, it also detracts from the credibility of the journals that have published the articles.

In the aforementioned *Vancouver Declaration* it is stated that if redundant publication occurs as in this case without notification of the editor, then a notice of redundant publication will be published without the author's

explanation or approval. This is what you are reading now. And, like other journals, *International Orthopaedics* will not consider further submissions from such authors for a period of 5 years.

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Editor

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