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Duplicate or fraudulent publications

The issue of duplicate submission and publication of abstracts and manuscripts, along with scientific fraud, has been a major concern of editors and the scientific press since the early 1980s. A consensus statement on submission and publication of manuscripts was published in the June issue of *Surgery*¹ and most general surgical journals, as well as some related to thoracic and cardiac surgery, vascular surgery, endoscopy, trauma and nutrition, plus 3 surgical journals from Japan and 1 from Germany. The statement, which evolved over some time, was the result of regular meetings of general surgical editors that take place every fall at the American College of Surgeons Clinical Congress.

The consensus statement addresses 2 problems: duplicate submission and publication and fraudulent publication. At least 3 editorials were published with the statement. In *Surgery*, along with their editorial,² Sarr and Warshaw published an article by Schein and Paladugu³ on redundant surgical publishing. This paper reviewed the 1998 issues of *Surgery*, *British Journal of Surgery* and *Archives of Surgery*. They found that 92 original articles (1 in 6) in these journals led to subsequent redundancy. Specifically, 147 papers were identified in other journals of which 13.6% were considered dual publications, 34% potentially dual and 52.4% "salami slicing," whereby small components of an overall study become minimal publishable units with the whole story put together as an extra. These data are devastating and disturbing.

The *Canadian Journal of Surgery* has not knowingly been in the bind of

dealing with these situations. However, it is hard to imagine that Canadian surgeons are different from their colleagues in other parts of the world or that our promotion criteria are so linked to teaching and other service to the University that we don't have pressure to publish. Before publishing the paper by Schein and Paladugu, the Editors of *Surgery* reviewed the data themselves and confirmed the validity of the defined duplicate publications. They acknowledged the difficulty in defining "potential dual publication" and "salami slicing" but supported the reprehensibility of the activity. Dr. Waddell and I will continue to be alert to these issues and hope never to encounter them.

The area of fraudulent publication has been discussed in many fora. The consensus statement outlines the problems of false data, plagiarism, falsification of a submission letter or copyright form, omitting reference to others in issues of priority and several problems relating to authorship. The fraudulent and falsification problems are quite obvious and clear cut. Somewhat less clear cut are issues of authorship. The Vancouver group was sufficiently troubled over proliferating numbers of authors that they have defined the obligations to be fulfilled in order to author a paper in their journals.⁴ The consensus statement reflects these concerns. The authorship issues are troublesome. Science is more complex today, but the proliferation of authorship seems to have outstripped complexity. The best example I can give is that for an "Images for Surgeons" section in another journal there have been as many as 6 authors for a photo or radiograph. It is hard to understand for a paragraph with no references what everyone did.

These issues will be brought to the Editorial Board at its upcoming meeting and we will be reporting back to you. If you have an opinion or wish to comment, we look forward to hearing from you.

References

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4. Hoey J. Who wrote this paper anyway? The new Vancouver Group statement refines the definition of authorship [see comment]. *CMAJ* 2000;163(6):716-7; Comment in: *CMAJ* 2000;163(11):1426-7.



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