

CORRESPONDENCE

Though *IJMR* was initially started as a quarterly publication with four issues in a year from 1913 to 1957, with effect from 1958 it was made bimonthly and from 1964 it became monthly and has been continuing with the same periodicity. During the period 18 supplements on topics ranging from toxemias, hepatitis and Kyasanur Forest Disease to 100 years of malaria research and streptococcal research to HPV were brought out between 1954 and 2006 and 22 special issues on topics like cholera, dengue, chikungunya, malaria and ageing to tuberculosis research and from leishmaniasis to metal toxicity and HIV/AIDS were published between 1964 and 2011. Special sections on maternal and child nutrition, cardiovascular disease research and haemoglobinopathies were also brought out between 2009 and 2011. Book reviews were introduced in the journal in 1959. More extended contributions on special subjects were published as special numbers known as *Indian Medical Research Memoirs*, that was a supplementary series to *IJMR* and a total of 38 volumes on topics like plague, kala-azar, medicinal plants, rabies, filariasis, malaria and anopheline mosquitoes were brought out between 1924 and 1954. An obituary with the title 'In Memoriam' on the demise of the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi was published in the April 1948 issue⁹ and many more obituaries of renowned luminaries like Charles Pardey Lukis, Ronald Ross, K. R. Iyengar, T. R. Rao, S. P. Ramakrishna, H. M. Bhatia, S. R. Naik, A. S. Paintal, Vijay Dhanda, V. Ramalingaswami, etc. were also published².

During the early decades of the 20th century, particularly before independence, research was focused mainly on the communicable and infectious diseases like plague, malaria (quinine, including cinchona derivatives), kala-azar, tuberculosis, dysentery as also nutritional disorders. A large number of papers published in *IJMR* during the initial few decades were based on various surveys, epidemic investigations and studies on nutritional deficiencies as well as entomological investigations and work related to snake bite, anti-venomous serum, ankylostomiasis, goitre, beri-beri, rabies, medicinal plants, cholera, etc. In recent years, keeping pace with the changing times, the research has been focused on microbiology, molecular biology, biotechnology, HIV/AIDS and newer diagnostics and devices, which is also reflected in the type of research published in *IJMR*. With the advancement in information and communication technology and to harness its benefits all the articles published in *IJMR* since its inception have been digitized and made available in a searchable interface with web-based manuscript management and processing system and with the addition of many new sections such as editorials, commentaries, correspondences, clinical images, etc.

The *IJMR* continues to be among the frontline journals in the medical and biomedical fraternity and has made rapid strides as is evident in the consistent rise of its impact factor from 0.383 in 2000 to 1.837 in 2011, and continued growth in its global outreach and indexing by all major global secondary services. It is

expected that *IJMR* will continue to benefit the vast global community and attain new heights in the coming years. The centenary year is a time to look into the path it has travelled and plan future strategies for raising the bar to newer levels.

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Journals of plagiarism

A few months ago, one of us (Foster) stared at a paper that had been sent to him by a colleague. Half of it was his – copied verbatim from his 2005 encyclopaedia article on health effects of radio-frequency fields into a paper by a different author and published in an obscure online journal¹. Within weeks, two other articles on a similar topic crossed his path. One had been published in 2012 in a different and equally obscure online journal². The second had appeared in the *Journal of Computer*

Assisted Tomography, a distinguished medical journal³. The authors of all three papers were from Indian institutes not known for research in the area, and the papers consisted largely or entirely of copy-and-paste from other sources without attribution.

Foster e-mailed the editors of the journals to complain about the problems. The editor of the *International Journal of Scientific Research Publications (IJSRP)*, was apologetic and removed the offending paper from the online table of con-

tents – but it remains in the 'online print volume' (a pdf file with the collected papers for the month). A second editor, of *Archives of Applied Science Research (AASR)* never responded to Foster's e-mail of complaint. The editor of the third, the *Journal of Computer Assisted Tomography*, launched an investigation but has taken no further action apart from complaining to the institute of the offending author.

Meanwhile, all the plagiarized papers remain online and some have been taken

up in websites of activists campaigning against what they believe are health risks of mobile phones. Since much of the plagiarized material came from those very websites in the first place, one might say that things have come full circle. Such behaviour is beyond reckless.

While legitimate scientific journals sometimes unknowingly publish papers with plagiarized content, the problem is far worse in what Jeffrey Beall, a librarian at the University of Colorado, calls 'predatory journals' (<http://scholarlyoa.com/>). He has compiled a list of more than a hundred open-access journals that, for a small fee, will publish papers in ISSN-numbered journals, no questions asked. The list is at <http://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/>. The journals appear to cater to authors from developing countries who need to publish papers in ISSN-numbered journals – which may account for the prominent listing of the ISSN numbers in the journals websites and papers.

For example, the *IJSRP* (<http://www.ijsrp.org/>) is a two-year-old online journal with no identified editor and no physical address (but an ISP address in Florida). The journal is ostensibly peer-reviewed, but its promise of two-week time to publication precludes any significant review of submitted manuscripts.

A search through a few recent issues of *IJSRP* quickly found more than a dozen papers that either consisted mostly of copy-and-paste or, in several cases, were verbatim copies of previous papers by different authors. A series of clinical papers in successive issues by a medical group in Lucknow describe studies that closely follow patient characteristics, results, and text of previous studies by different authors. For example, a paper in the May issue by Patel (CSM Medical University, Lucknow) purports to describe a study conducted on diabetic patients in Lucknow. The paper is virtually identical, both in text and in data, to a 2011 paper about a clinical study in Romania by Rusu *et al.*, published in *Applied Medical Informatics*. When shown this paper, the Romanian author responded to Foster, 'It is impossible to have a cohort

of Indian patients and a cohort of Caucasian patients matched in every single aspects.'

Searches through recent issues of *AASR* (one of a family of 12 online journals with an Indian ISP address) uncovered no cases of wholesale theft as with *IJSRP*. However, a significant fraction of the papers had copy-and-paste issues that would be sufficient for retraction by more established journals.

More predatory journals are coming out every week, thanks to software packages that make it easy to set up a 'journal' with a seemingly impressive title. There are so many such journals that their publishers are running out of titles, and are resorting to subterfuge. (The Maryland Institute of Research, Beall reports, is located in Bangladesh; one journal has incorporated the logo of Elsevier, a major academic publisher, on its website, while another has apparently filled seven issues with nonsense articles to appear successful. These faux journals serve as thieves' markets for stolen property.)

What is to be done? The scientific community should de-legitimize predatory journals. As Beal recommends, 'scholars [should] not do any business with these publishers, including submitting articles, serving as editors or on editorial boards, or advertising with them'. Foremost, journals, universities, research institutes, regulatory bodies and funding agencies around the world need to raise standards of accountability. Inexpensive plagiarism detectors are available and should be used routinely by professors and journal editors. Plagiarism Detector (<http://www.plagiarism-detector.com/>) is an inexpensive program that searches passages in a text against the Internet. This crude approach will catch the most egregious cases such as those discussed here. Whether the faux journals will use such tools is uncertain, although the possibility of being sued for copyright infringement would likely be an inducement even for these journals.

Journals need a credible peer-review system supported by a reputed editorial board. Journals need to be more outspo-

ken in their retraction of plagiarized material, and not (as seems to be current practice of most journals, including the reputed ones) quietly withdraw plagiarized papers with little justification or notice – or do nothing, as with the *Journal of Computer Assisted Tomography*. Recently, a good example was set by the *Indian Journal of Dermatology*, which permanently banned a group of Tunisian researchers for serial plagiarism in the journal (<http://retractionwatch.wordpress.com/2012/06/20/serial-plagiarizers-banned-from-dermatology-journal-forever/#more-8261>).

Publicizing cases of academic plagiarism (which has been done by the Society for Scientific Values in India, and the Chinese Government in China) can increase accountability. Sending letters of complaint to heads of academic and research institutes of offending scholars will certainly attract institutional attention to the problem. The Chinese Government has set an excellent example of posting on its official website the names of a large number of plagiarist academics as also the penalty meted to them in the form of stopped promotions and research grants. The Office of Research Integrity, USA has also set some good examples of penalizing scientific misconduct in life sciences.

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