

Publication ethics

Ng CJ, Editor in Chief

Liew SM, Associate Editor

In the past six months, this Journal has received several manuscripts that violated publication ethics. One paper was submitted to another journal concurrently (duplicate submission) while another reported data that overlapped substantially with a paper published by the same author previously (redundant publication).

Authors sometimes submit the same manuscript to two or more journals simultaneously to 'save time'. They would publish their paper in whichever journal that accepts the paper first. This would appear to be an efficient approach to getting the paper published quickly. However, duplicate submission results in the manuscript undergoing peer reviewing and editing by two journals and this is a waste of editors' and reviewers' time and effort. If the manuscript is accepted and published by both journals, there is duplication of publication leading to 'double-counting' of study results which may potentially distort research evidence. Duplicate submission often occurs in authors publishing for the first time who are unaware of publication ethics. Therefore, when this occurs, it is prudent that the authors explain their action to the editors of both journals and voluntarily withdraw from one of the journals.

In redundant publication, the manuscript reports data that have already been published and, hence, do not add anything new to the existing knowledge. Sometimes, what constitutes 'substantial overlap' may not be immediately clear and requires some judgment. There are many reasons why authors do this. Firstly, the authors may not be able to objectively assess the amount of data overlap of their papers. Secondly, the 'publish or perish' culture in many academic institutions has pressurised some academicians to publish more papers. To avoid this, the authors should declare that data from the same study have been published when submitting the manuscript. They should highlight how data from the newly submitted manuscript adds to what has already been reported previously. Papers that have been previously published from the same study should be referenced and sent to the editors to allow them to ascertain the degree of overlap.

It is important for authors to be familiar with good publication practice. There are two useful resources that authors can refer to for more information:

1. International Committee of Medical Journal Editors: <http://www.icmje.org/>
2. Committee on Publication Ethics: <http://publicationethics.org/>

If in doubt, it is always a good idea to write to the journal editor for clarification. The Malaysian Family Physician welcomes discussion and feedback on this issue.