

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor

Plagiarism, or scientific fraud, is not new subject at all. Etymology points to its ancient roots. It is, therefore, an inseparable part of any documented scientific activity. It is like cancer that cannot be stopped from occurring as it is part and parcel of natural biological processes. Like cancer, plagiarism cannot be avoided or eliminated, but must somehow be controlled. This requires not only vigilance, but also putting into place a reasonably accurate, fast and universally accepted mechanism. Already Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) has become institutionalized and will, hopefully, establish a permanent place in the world of scientific journalism.

I took heart, and admittedly some secret pleasure, in reading that some of the past giants in science, succumbed to the temptation of publishing other scientists' works as their own. I cannot resist the temptation to add to the list, and will limit myself to what I read somewhere about Sigmund Freud having made up some of his clinical cases to support his views. But I refuse to even attempt to prove this allegation. But plagiarism is not limited to the field of science. A recent article in the Economist had it that Churchill used a lot of material in his six volume work on World War II, that had been the work of major military and naval leaders who, in deference to Sir Winston, did not openly protest his plagiarism.

There is always a good side to every evil, however. One of the problems facing the scientific community of developing countries is the absence—perhaps a weak presence—of a trustworthy and efficient mechanism to spot plagiarism. It is far easier in developed countries to dismiss a professor who has been caught doing fraudulent research or plagiarized someone else's work, than it is in developing countries to even accuse, much less fire a faculty member for academic misdemeanor. Now that the universal

pressure on academicians to publish, has reached universities of developing countries, the first step would be to install a local mechanism that would screen all scientific papers for their authenticity. After a while, just to protect their good name, those ranking professors heretofore immune to any criticism, will think twice before committing plagiarism.

Reference

- 1 Nayernouri T. Fraud and Dishonesty in "Scientific" Publication. *Arch Iranian Med.* 2009; **12 (1)**: 1 – 4.

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Authors' Reply

As Dr. Farrokh Saidi has pointed out, plagiarism is an ancient practice, but it is only in recent times that it has come to be regarded as unethical and a serious scientific misconduct. The ancient Greeks were experts at "borrowing" ideas and concepts from neighboring civilizations without ever mentioning the original sources. Plagiarism was also rife in the middle ages and during the renaissance in Europe but fraud became more prevalent since the Age of Enlightenment, when biased theories forced some scientific giants to manipulate their data to prove their foregone conclusions.

I hope that Dr. Saidi's wish that fraud and plagiarism will diminish in third world scientific circles will come true, but I am wary of such predictions.

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