

Updates to Policies and Procedures Related to Potential Scientific and Academic Misconduct in the Journals of the American Diabetes Association

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On behalf of the American Diabetes Association (ADA), we are indebted to the departing editorial teams of *Diabetes* and *Diabetes Care*, led by Peter C. Butler, MD, and Vivian A. Fonseca, MD, respectively. Over the last five years, both editorial teams have not only taken great efforts to cement the status of *Diabetes* and *Diabetes Care* as the premier journals devoted to diabetes research, but they have also diligently worked to ensure that research published in ADA journals adheres to international standards and requirements for biomedical publications.

Based on the input of Drs. Butler and Fonseca and their editorial teams, as well as the recommendations of various publications policy advisory groups (most notably the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors and the World Association of Medical Editors), the Association's Publications Policy Committee (PPC) has recently completed a comprehensive review of the publication policies and procedures for *Diabetes* and *Diabetes Care*. As part of the review process, ADA has made important updates to its policies and procedures related to potential academic and scientific misconduct in manuscripts submitted to its journals. We highly encourage all authors to review both the publication policies (1,2) and the instructions for authors (3,4) for *Diabetes* and *Diabetes Care*. The following are three important updates that authors should be aware of before submitting their work to the journals.

First, to help protect against the publication of plagiarized and previously published work, *Diabetes* and *Diabetes Care* adopted a widely used plagiarism detection system (5) in 2009. The system scans the text of submitted papers and compares it to a comprehensive and growing database of full-text scholarly and academic materials—including several thousand scientific and medical journal articles—and generates “similarity” reports between submitted and previously published works. All manuscripts submitted to *Diabetes* and *Diabetes Care* are scanned by the system at the time of submission, and each similarity report is soon thereafter reviewed by ADA and made available to the editors during the peer review process.

This measure was established in response to an increase over the last several years in the frequency of submitted manuscripts that copy not necessarily others' works, but authors' own previously published work, without proper attribution or acknowledgment. This practice of duplicating one's own previously published work and passing it off as original is now commonly referred to as “self-plagiarism.” We should note that ADA journals require authors to confirm, at the time of manuscript submission, that “neither the manuscript nor any part of it [...] has been published or is under consideration for publication elsewhere.” This requirement applies also to online-only supplemental material, which is considered to be “part” of a manuscript or publication, and to papers that may have been previously published or submitted in another language.

ADA journals will allow authors to reuse concise and well-written literature reviews and methodology descriptions from their own previously published work, assuming such text is properly cited and noted to the editors at the time of submission, but it is not permissible to present previously published data, study results, or conclusions as original research in manuscripts submitted to ADA journals. We encourage authors to refer to Dr. Miguel Roig's guide to ethical writing (6) for useful instruction on avoiding plagiarism, as well as to a recent white paper by the proprietors of iThenticate (7) that examines the ethics of self-plagiarism.

Second, as the use of digital image-editing applications has become more common, it has become easier for authors to make alterations to digital graphics that—either intentionally or unintentionally—could modify data presented in digital images and thereby mislead readers. Even if adjustments to images are made for aesthetic reasons only or to present data more clearly, authors must be careful that stylistic alterations do not inadvertently alter, or potentially falsify or fabricate, the data or results presented in the graphics.

Several years ago, *Diabetes* and *Diabetes Care*, like many journals, adopted the statement developed by the *Journal of Cell Biology* (8) as their guideline and policy on the manipulation of digital images:

No specific feature within an image may be enhanced, obscured, moved, removed, or introduced. The grouping of images from different parts of the same gel, or from different gels, fields, or exposures must be made explicit by the arrangement of the figure (i.e., using dividing lines) and in the text of the figure legend. Adjustments of brightness, contrast, or color balance are acceptable if they are applied to the whole image [i.e., every pixel in the image] and as long as they do not obscure, eliminate, or misrepresent any information present in the original, including backgrounds. Without any background information, it is not possible to see exactly how much of the original gel is actually shown. Non-linear adjustments (e.g.,

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changes to gamma settings) must be disclosed in the figure legend.

In 2010, to protect against publishing data fabricated by inappropriately altered graphics, *Diabetes* and *Diabetes Care* integrated the use of “image forensics” software in their production workflows. The image forensics software scans all images in manuscripts accepted for publication and generates “before-and-after” reports on suspect or obvious image manipulation. Based on the review of each report, ADA may contact authors to request more information about the images or the source files of images. The publication of a manuscript may be put on hold until the Association has had a chance to consult with the author and to review the source files of images that have been flagged by the software. We encourage authors and readers to refer to the consolidated policies and procedures page for the journals (1,2) for more information on ADA’s digital image manipulation policy. A 2004 editorial in the *Journal of Cell Biology* provides good visual examples of inappropriate digital manipulation (9).

Third, and most important, at the recommendation of ADA journal editors, the Publications Policy Committee approved in early 2011 a proposal to create a new subcommittee to investigate and adjudicate cases related to plagiarism, inappropriate image manipulation, and other issues of potential scientific and academic misconduct. The new subcommittee reports to the PPC and is called the Subcommittee on Ethical Scientific Publications.

All potential cases of scientific misconduct are now referred to the subcommittee, which works on behalf of the editors of ADA journals and the PPC to independently, objectively, and efficiently investigate cases of potential or perceived misconduct. The term-limited committee is comprised of expert independent investigators who share the PPC’s vision for appropriateness in scientific procedures. When investigating and responding to cases of suspected misconduct, the subcommittee follows the guidelines developed by the member-based Committee on Publication Ethics (10) and operates with the utmost regard for the sensitivity and confidentiality required to fairly resolve such matters.

More information on how the American Diabetes Association responds to cases of scientific misconduct can be found in the online policies and procedures pages of each journal (1,2). Updates to ADA publication policies will be posted online and announced in both the print and online editions of each journal. We encourage interested authors to contact the Association’s Editorial Office (editorialoffice@

diabetes.org) if they have questions about any of ADA’s publication policies.

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