

## Scientific Conduct and the Editorial Office

Chair:

**Beth A Fischer**

University of Pittsburgh  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Panelists:

**Patricia K Hodgson**

*American Heart Journal*  
Durham, North Carolina

**Dana St John Kolar**

*Circulation*  
Houston, Texas

**Deborah A Whippen**

*Journal of Clinical Oncology*  
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts

Reporter:

**Sameh Fahmy**

Texas A&M University  
College Station, Texas

In an ideal world, authors and reviewers are always honest, but the reality is that journal editors sometimes are confronted with cases of misconduct on the part of authors and reviewers. In this session, Beth A Fischer, codirector of the Survival Skills and Ethics Program and instructor in education at the University of Pittsburgh, presented 3 panelists with cases of misconduct and possible conflicts of interest to gain insight into how editors handle such situations.

In a situation where authors of a paper indicate that another author fabricated data, Deborah A Whippen, managing editor and director of publications at the American Society of Clinical Oncology, suggested asking the authors to submit evidence of misconduct and then giving the accused author the opportunity to reply. Dana St John Kolar, managing editor of *Circulation*, added that after the accused author has been given a

chance to respond, the matter should be turned over to the appropriate institution's office of research integrity. "There may be some political in-fighting going on that we don't want to get involved in", she said. An audience member commented that editors should exercise caution to avoid litigation. Fischer said that journals don't have the legal right or the resources to subpoena data and that situations involving fabrication are best left to the office of research integrity in the institution at which the research in question was conducted.

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In a situation where an institutional review board told an editor that data had been fabricated, St John Kolar suggested exercising caution. She would not publish a retraction until all appeals were settled, she said—a process that could take years. "Journals leave themselves open to lawsuits if they don't wait."

The panelists agreed that oral and poster presentations can be seen as a first step toward disseminating research results. Although journals generally have no problem with the preliminary presentation of research results through seminars and posters at conferences, many journals are still deciding whether a researcher's posting of data to the Internet constitutes prior publication. St John Kolar said that a poster placed on the Internet is similar to any other poster presentation and would not be considered prior publication. She said that publishing an entire paper definitely constitutes prior publication. The panelists said that they did

not know whether posting an article in newsgroups constitutes prior publication.

In dealing with cases of possible misconduct and conflicts of interest, the panel agreed that having clear policies and forms before problems occur is prudent. An audience member said that authors often do not read forms and instructions and should be more aware of their ethical responsibilities. Patricia K Hodgson, director of communications at the Duke Clinical Research Institute and managing editor of the *American Heart Journal*, said that authors need better ethics training. "Young physicians and scientists today don't receive any training in the rules of publication", she said. "I don't know how we can re-educate everyone." Whippen said that editors have a role in mentoring authors and should give authors ethical guidance.

Fischer said that there are often no clear-cut answers to ethical dilemmas. In closing, she suggested that editors expect problems, have policies before they need them, and develop support networks. 

### Resources for Scientific Conduct and the Editorial Office

Council of Biology Editors  
[www.cbe.org](http://www.cbe.org)

Society for Neuroscience Guidelines on Responsible Conduct Regarding Scientific Communication  
[www.sfn.org/guidelines/](http://www.sfn.org/guidelines/)

Survival Skills and Ethics Program  
[www.pitt.edu/~survival](http://www.pitt.edu/~survival)

LaFollette MC. *Stealing into print: fraud, plagiarism, and misconduct in scientific publishing*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.