

◆ *Research Integrity and Publication Ethics*

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In September 2001, in the International Council of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) issued new guidelines in its Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals concerning research integrity and publication ethics. The ICMJE document states, "If substantial doubts arise about the honesty of work, either submitted or published, it is the editor's responsibility to ensure that the question is appropriately pursued (including possible consultation with the authors). However, it is not the task of editors to conduct a full investigation or to make a determination; that responsibility lies with the institution where the work was done or with the funding agency." In this session, representatives of the National Science Foundation (NSF) Office of Inspector General (OIG) and the US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Research Integrity (ORI) discussed important concerns in publication ethics and how journal editors can address them.

Research misconduct, as defined by NSF, is "fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results." According to Catherine N Ball, the peer-review process is critical for detecting mis-

conduct in research proposals and reports of funded research. But although NSF staff forward allegations received from proposal reviewers, journal editors are not reporting allegations in manuscript reviews. Ball made a plea to journal editors to forward all allegations of misconduct involving NSF-funded research because journal editors are NSF's only link to the manuscript review process.

On 6 December 2000, the Office of Science and Technology Policy published its notification of final federal policy on

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research misconduct in the *Federal Register* (Volume 65, Number 235). That document outlined the policy that defines misconduct and discusses actions that should be taken when misconduct is found. The policy applies to all federally funded research and proposals submitted to federal agencies for funding. The policy was written to "establish the scope of the Federal government's interest in the accuracy and reliability of the research record and the processes involved in its development." Mary Scheetz said that journals are included in this policy because they are considered research records. It is there-

fore important that journal editors take instances of research misconduct seriously.

Scheetz pointed out that when a published article must be corrected, many people are affected. According to Scheetz, "the Public Health Service works to ensure that the public record is corrected." After that has occurred, it is still possible for the article to be cited in future work. Handling allegations of misconduct appropriately is important. Both offices have preferred methods of handling misconduct and discourage editors from trying to conduct investigations on their own. For example, calling a researcher's direct supervisor at an institution may serve as an alert to the researcher or result in an overharsh punishment, depending on how the supervisor feels about the researcher.

Ball suggested that editors have two options when faced with an instance of possible misconduct in research supported by NSF: to contact NSF directly or to ask the reviewer who made the allegation to contact NSF. NSF-funded research will acknowledge NSF support and will include a disclaimer that says that the work is based on work supported by NSF. More information on reporting misconduct to NSF is at www.oig.nsf.gov.

ORI suggests that editors follow the instructions set out in its document *Managing Allegations of Scientific Misconduct: A Guidance Document for Editors* when allegations of misconduct are made. The document, which offers step-by-step suggestions for action, can be found at ori.dhhs.gov or obtained by contacting ORI. ORI will also be funding an Editor's Council through an education grant awarded to the Council of Science Editors. The goal is to bring together people involved in all areas of research to educate them and help implement codes of responsible research conduct. 