

## Ethics Clinic, Part 2

*Moderator:*

**Diane Scott-Lichter**  
Blackwell Publishing, Inc  
Malden, Massachusetts

*Panelists:*

**Martin Blume**  
American Physical Society  
Ridge, New York

**Bruce Dancik**  
NRC Research Press  
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

**Debra M Parrish**  
Parrish Law Offices  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

**Mary Scheetz**  
Office of Research Integrity  
Rockville, Maryland

**Emilie Marcus**  
Cell Press  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

**Andrew Robinson**  
Blackwell Publishing, Inc  
Oxford, United Kingdom

**Valerie Siddall**  
Astra Zeneca  
Cheshire, United Kingdom

**Sheri Thornberg**  
Cardinal Health  
Dublin, Ohio

*Reporter:*

**Angela Cochran**  
American Cancer Society  
Atlanta, Georgia

During part 2 of the Ethics Clinic, several sticky situations were presented, with follow-up questions posed to a panel of experts and the audience.

The first case included issues of possible

plagiarism by a graduate student, a systemic plagiarism problem at an institution, and an investigative panel with close ties to the authors being questioned. Some panelists felt that addressing allegations with the graduate student constituted a teaching opportunity. According to panelist and attorney Debra Parrish, some universities are reluctant to penalize a student harshly in such a situation. "This person is in educational training in an academic community", said Parrish. She added that guidelines regarding manuscript preparation and malfeasance are not always clear in graduate-school settings. There is an assumption, which may be false, that everyone knows the rules by the time they become graduate students, she said.

Panelists' comments were varied, but there was some consensus: University deans must act quickly when plagiarism claims are made, investigative committees should be free of conflicts of interest, and plagiarism and ethics discussions are critical at every educational level.

Panelist Martin Blume, of the American Physical Society, noted that journal instructions often do not provide guidance to authors about what to do when allegations are made.

It was asked whether journals open themselves up to libel or slander suits when they investigate accusations. "Truth is the defense", said Parrish. She noted that journals receive threatening letters from attorneys often but are seldom sued.

In the second case, panelists debated what to do when financial ties are not properly disclosed. An author listed a university as his affiliation but had not disclosed that he was CEO of the laboratory that created the bird flu vaccine discussed in his paper. Several questions were raised: Did the university employ the author? Did the university have financial ties to the laboratory? Should the journal have been suspicious in the first place? "If someone sends me a paper [about] a bird flu vaccine,

I'm going to take a look at this. It's amazing how much you can find on Google these days", audience member Faith McLellan, of *The Lancet*, said.

A second panel was introduced and asked what to do if a pharmaceutical company asks to see an entire journal issue before placing an advertising order. "It's not kosher, and it's grossly criminal", said audience member Annette Flanagan, of the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*. Panelist Emilie Marcus, editor of *Cell*, agreed, stating that no one can buy early access to journal content with the promise of advertising.

Another question was whether editors should be paid a royalty based on supplement or reprint sales. Panelist Andrew Robinson, of Blackwell Publishing, noted that most editors are paid a flat fee as opposed to the older royalty-based contracts. By show of hands, most of the audience agreed that a flat-fee contract is the best option for editor payment.

The issue of industry-specific bias in editorial-review policy was raised. There was agreement that biases exist, particularly against papers submitted by pharmaceutical companies, but Flanagan noted that there is good reason for journals to be careful. "We've been burned, and that is why policies are being put into place", Flanagan said. Panelist Valerie Siddall, of Astra Zeneca, noted that not only editors and reviewers are biased but also readers.

Overall, the consensus was that standard journal guidelines regarding ethical issues are needed. With each journal having its own policy or punishments for malfeasance, it is difficult to effect change in the market. ☹