Description

Scientists often work diligently to carefully collect and report data. Such process leads to advancements in every discipline. In particular, new biomedical manuscripts are subject to a rigorous peer review process that ensures the scientific integrity and quality of a new article prior to publication. Here, we report on a compromise in this process in the form of fake peer review, which led to a massive series of retractions in *Molecular Neurobiology*.

Peer review is a healthy process in that it provides an alternative perspective on data analysis and the conclusions drawn from the data. Fraud, while rare, does occur and often reflects symptoms of underlying structural problems in the country where major fraud occurs. Indeed, a study of retractions since 2010 has revealed that 250 papers in total were retracted. Among these, a majority (74.8%) of the retracted papers were written by authors who publish in the top 5 journals, which include the *Journal of Vibration and Control (24.8%), Molecular Biology Reports (11.6%), Immunopharmacology and Immunotoxicology (8.0%), Tumour Biology (6.8%) and European Journal of Medical Research (6.4%).*

Sham Peer Review Scheme

Recently, a record number of manuscripts were retracted from *Tumor Biology.* The retraction of 107 manuscripts was related to fake peer reviews. For these reviews, either a fictional “expert in the field” or a real expert (who was listed with a fake email address) was provided to the journal for peer review. The subsequent recipient of the peer review invitation, who often was a part of the author team, would approve the manuscript for publication. In some instances, a third party editing service was involved in providing fake peer reviews.

As noted above, mostly Chinese clinicians were listed as authors on these manuscripts. Many clinicians can attest to the difficulty in seeing both many patients while also conducting research**.** However, it is important to ethically conduct and report research findings.

The same journal was hit with 25 retractions the year prior, mostly by authors in Iran, for participating in the same fake peer review scheme. At the end of 2016, Springer discontinued *Tumor Biology*.

Molecular Neurobiology Purge

Similar to the *Tumor Biology* purge, 12 papers have so far been retracted from *Molecular Neurobiology* due to falsified peer reviews. While more information has not been provided, the authors listed on these dozen papers came from China. Interestingly, some of these authors were also listed as authors on the papers that were previously retracted from *Tumor Biology.*

Reminders for Integrity

Research scientists hold an esteemed position in society. They are tasked with deciphering the truth. Accordingly, data is collected and reported so that subsequent work can continue to advance human knowledge.

In order to ensure that your papers are not retracted, keep clear and thorough records of data. Be sure that data is clearly understandable. If data analysis required data transformation, be sure to clearly report this in the methods section. Furthermore, never modify an image, such as a Western blot, by adjusting intensities of bands in one part, but not in other parts, of the same figure.

Ultimately, scientists must simply be honest and transparent at all stages of research**.** Journals, editors, peer reviewers, and readers can all read your manuscripts and any can raise a question regarding the integrity of the data. After putting so much time and money into conducting experiments, why lie about your outcomes? The peer review process will help you refine your work. By trying to circumvent the peer review process, such as the authors of those retracted papers, you too will be accused of scientific misconduct and your papers will be retracted. Not only will your professional resume show one less paper, your reputation will forever be tarnished by a retraction.

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