Description

The cancer journal, *Tumor Biology*, has uncovered 107 papers that had undergone a fake peer review process and retracted all of them. This retraction is the largest yet by a single journal and affects more than 500 authors, largely Chinese clinicians. Fake peer review is an example of scientific misconduct and exploits the fact that editors often need help finding reviewers. When an editor requests that an author suggest reviewers for their manuscript, the author would suggest someone whom they know will give a favorable review, such as a colleague or a graduate student they supervise. Alternatively, the author might suggest actual experts in the field but supply a fake email address that they control. The invitation to review the article goes to this email address, allowing them to review their own paper in the name of a scientific expert. The glowing review is submitted to the journal and the editor thinks that the person who conducted the peer review is none the wiser. Up until the end of 2016, Springer published *Tumor Biology* but as of January 2017, SAGE is the new publisher.

This peer review scandal actually highlights some vulnerabilities in the system, as well as the enormous pressure Chinese doctors are under to publish while maintaining a heavy clinical load. Aside from arranging to review their own papers, authors have also been known to work together, using these fake email addresses to allow them to review each other's work at a higher than expected rate, as well as citing each other frequently. ScholarOne, a reviewing platform used by several journals, sends an email to a reviewer with their login information. If that email is one associated with fake peer

review, the author of the paper under review can log in with those credentials without needing any other kind of identity verification.

Another reviewing platform, Editorial Manager, will send users their password in an email if they claim they have forgotten it. This is vastly different from more modern services such as Google, which take more stringent methods to protect passwords. There are technical measures that can be put in place to make peer review fraud more difficult to get away with. However, it will always be necessary for editors to invest in manually verifying that the persons they have selected to perform peer review are credible.

Springer's *Tumor Biology* has had retractions for scientific misconduct before. In 2016, 25 papers were retracted because of fake peer review. This latest medical journal retraction also shines a light on Chinese research papers and brings their credibility into question. However, a Beijing oncologist revealed that this peer review scandal is a symptom of the degree of pressure put on Chinese doctors to handle an almost impossible clinical load while being expected to publish papers to secure promotions. The anonymous oncologist questioned how they can be expected to see more than 50 patients daily and still have time to conduct research.

The fake peer review scandal uncovered by Springer in *Tumor Biology* is another example of scientific misconduct facilitated by the pressure to publish and the struggle editors' face to find reviewers. Hopefully, not just cancer journals but also other international medical journals will tighten their editorial restrictions to prevent fake peer review.

Category

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