Description

An academic paper published and shared online will be corrected or retracted much more often than a research paper that is only shared privately. Data was gathered by Dr. Paul Brookes, an associate professor at the University of Rochester Medical Center. Brookes found that life science research papers are corrected or retracted roughly seven times more often than papers that are only privately discussed.

Brookes actually started his own website to identify potential problems with information presented in life science academic papers. The website, science-fraud.org, went up in July of 2012 but ran into severe problems with the academic world and publishers. Brookes ran the website anonymously, of course, but after being threatened with a lawsuit, was forced to divulge his identity and remove all of the website's content. Even now, almost a year later, Brookes is still harassed with attempts at legal action, primarily suits involving defamation of character.

After the threats, Brookes did remove the website content and succumbed to the pressure mainly due to the effort and time that it takes to engage in such a battle. His job at the University of Rochester Medical Center is demanding enough and a fight of this magnitude was something that he could just not afford to enter into. It seems that others have now attempted to follow in Brookes' footsteps.

For example, Retraction Watch has corrected an academic paper by Bharat Aggarwal, an MD Anderson researcher who is under investigation by his institution for doctoring images in his research. Aggarwal is a cancer researcher whose work has been questioned not only by Retraction Watch but others in the field as well. Attorneys for Aggarwal served notice to Retraction Watch to pull all content that refers to their client or legal action would be taken.

Even though under attack, Brookes has received an overwhelming amount of support. He has received words of encouragement and offers of help from all sorts of colleagues, government officials, even those whose work he had questioned. The result is what Brookes hopes will come together—post-publication peer review. A research paper would be made available and peers would be able to review the work and help to ensure its scholarship and worthiness. There is definitely a need for websites of this type; it is just of matter of putting them into use in a way that is beneficial for all.

It has always been Brookes' contention that the review of research, especially in the sciences, is beneficial for the public. It is not to defame or to tarnish the reputation of the author or authors but to ensure that correct information is being made available to the public. If a problem is identified with someone's research, there should be a way to question, and ultimately, correct it. To publish knowingly information that is not correct does not benefit the author of the research nor the audience that reads it. Allowing experts in a certain field to review work and correct any problems can only be for the greater good.

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