

Editorial – Lies have short legs

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In the last century, we observed a dramatic increasing of life expectancy in industrialized countries, mainly due to the improvement of lifestyle and global health. Research is the reason why all this happened. Just try to imagine a world without continuous quality improvement of medical technology and drug innovation. Without research, you would not even have had the opportunity to read this article today. But what if data produced by the research are false?

In the last years, we have observed a dramatic increase of fake articles published in several medical journals. Thanks to the crucial work of Dr. Elisabeth Bik, a California-based microbiologist and image-analysis expert, who shed light on research misconduct and figure manipulation, we investigated about the fraudulent reuse of images and data in articles published in the European Review for Medical and Pharmacological Sciences journal. Surprisingly, we found a consistent number of articles displaying those characteristics. Unfortunately, similarly to what happened in other journals, anti-plagiarism program was not able to capture corrupted images, as it works only on the verification of the text.

We have immediately initiated a strong action against this phenomenon, by contacting all corresponding authors of the faulty articles, asking them to provide raw data, proof of originality and ownership of their researches. After this investigation, we retracted 65 papers, due to ambiguous replies and missing data from corresponding authors. But our job continues; other papers are under investigation. In the meantime, we will keep enforcing all peer review processes to avoid further misconduct. We firmly disapprove any kind of data manipulation and thank again Dr. Bik for her valuable activity that will be a real benefit for the whole scientific community.

Research is to see what everybody else has seen, and to think what nobody else has thought, said the 1937 Nobel Prize Albert Szent-Györgyi de Nagyrápolt. Obviously, if I write something that I have not seen I will most likely be wrong. If science is life and life is science, any research misconduct is a crime against science and life. Any researcher should never forget it.