IOVS Statement on “Double Publication”

Every author who submits a manuscript to a peer-reviewed journal, whether in ophthalmology and visual science, or in any other field, must verify during the submission process that “the work described herein is original, has not been published all or in part previously except as an abstract for a meeting, and is not currently under consideration for publication in any other journal.” Violation of any part of this statement is considered “double publication,” and is a serious transgression of academic ethics.

“Double publication” involves repeat publication, or attempts at publication, of text, figures, or data in any form of publicly available media without citation in the later manuscript. In addition to articles in peer-reviewed journals, double publication also involves repeat publication of material that has appeared in book chapters or symposium volumes, so long as these materials are publicly available. An author can, of course, repeatedly cite prior data in subsequent manuscripts, provided he or she cites the original source of the data in a reference listing. Graphs, photomicrographs, or other illustrative material can be republished, provided the author has obtained permission from the prior authors and publisher and cites that permission in the legend for the reprinted figure.

Perhaps because of the increasing availability through the electronic media of scientific papers very soon after publication, and because manuscripts for IOVS and for many other journals are now circulated for review electronically, we have become increasingly aware of instances of attempted “double publication.” Because there are no statistics on present or past episodes (although Clouthier1 cites the increasing number of publications on the subject to indicate that such episodes are increasing), we cannot assert with certainty that the practice is growing. But we can state that there have been several instances over the past few years in which reviewers or Editorial Board members for IOVS have recognized parts of manuscripts they are reviewing as something that they have seen before. In some cases, the duplication involves just a single figure or all or part of a table of data. In other cases, entire paragraphs or larger portions of a manuscript are copied verbatim from another manuscript—either one that has already been published or one that is currently under review.

Another situation in which “double publication” may pose a problem occurs when an investigator presents his or her results at a scientific meeting, and these results are then reported in a “throwaway” journal before they have been published or, often, even before they have been evaluated and accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. Although presentation of results at a scientific meeting before they are published in the peer-reviewed literature is certainly permissible, as is publication of these results in short form in the abstracts of the meeting, reporting of these results in widely distributed, non-peer-reviewed, commercial throwaway publications is highly inappropriate. This matter has been discussed at length in a recent publication.2

When the Editor-in-Chief or staff are alerted that a manuscript that has been submitted to IOVS may represent “double publication,” the Editor-in-Chief carefully evaluates the manuscript and other relevant prior publications or manuscripts currently under review elsewhere (with the permission of that journal’s editors), to ensure that authors are not being unjustly accused. In such instances, I feel that it is not an invasion of the authors’ privacy to share manuscript data among the editors of two or more journals, for the purpose of comparison. Should it be determined that “double publication” is being attempted, the manuscripts in question are summarily rejected, and the authors are notified of the reason for the rejection. I consider with great care any response that the author(s) make to this notification. If all or a part of a manuscript that is being reviewed for possible publication is found to duplicate a report that has already been published, the editors of the journal where the prior publication has appeared are notified so that they may consider requiring retraction of the earlier paper. Depending on the flagrancy of the ethical violation, I may decide that further steps are necessary, including communication with appropriate officials at the author’s (or authors’) institution(s).

The American Ophthalmological Society Exception

By longstanding tradition, there is one exception to the rules stated herein. This exception applies to theses that are required for membership in the American Ophthalmological Society (AOS) and are published annually in the Transactions of that society, and also to papers that are presented at the AOS annual meeting and published in the AOS Transactions. The AOS Transactions, although publicly available and listed in PubMed Central and other databases, has a limited circulation. Theses submitted for AOS membership, like doctoral theses at universities, are lengthy and not easily read in their entirety. Therefore, portions of these theses may be submitted for peer review and possible publication in any of our journals, provided that the following two rules are applied:

1. The abridged thesis, or portion thereof, must be submitted to the IOVS editorial office for peer review sufficiently in advance of the appearance of the entire thesis in the AOS Transactions that the abridged work, if accepted, will be published before the full thesis is published.

2. A footnote must be included stating that the article is a portion of a thesis that has been presented as a part of the requirement for election to membership in the American Ophthalmological Society and that the complete thesis will be published in the AOS Transactions.

Conclusion

Publication of an original scientific paper in a widely recognized, peer-reviewed journal confers distinction on the author(s) of the paper. Publication of many papers is a major criterion for advancement in rank and the granting of continued tenure at academic institutions around the world. Failure to publish may lead to the inability to be promoted, or to obtain tenure, at many institutions. This “publish-or-perish” requirement may serve as a stimulus to a few authors to publish some results repetitively or to publish manuscripts containing incremental information that differs only minimally from prior publications. As Editor-in-Chief, I recognize with some regret
the presence of this problem within our profession. Our au-
thors are encouraged to continue to submit the results of their
clinical and laboratory studies, but they are also urged to use
the utmost caution to ensure that these publications remain
original and do not violate the ethics rules that are included in
this statement.

Robert N. Frank, MD
Editor-in-Chief

References

1. Clouthier SG. Institutionalized plagiarism: honor among thieves
remains an impediment to purging misconduct from scientific
scientist.com/yr2004/aug/opinion_040802.html.

2. Bressler NM, Liesegang T, Schachat AP, Albert DM. Advantages and
potential dangers of presentation before publication. Arch Oph-