

August 23, 2012

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**Phil J. Daly**, Senior Publisher, Wolters Kluwer Health Medical Research, Lippincott Williams & Wilkins

We are sadly forced to write this letter for two main reasons. One is to inform you that those of us who are Members will resign, effective August 31, from the Editorial Board of the Journal of Cardiovascular Medicine in the case the current editor, Dr. Raffaele Bugiardini, is not immediately relieved from his post. The second is to share with you the shocking and shameful facts that have recently surfaced and demand a prompt response by all those involved, according to the individual roles and responsibilities. This appears to be the worst scam ever associated with an international journal of medicine and raises cogent questions on the roles of all those, be it individuals or companies, who had positions of control in the JCM. We will summarize the facts as succinctly as the seriousness of the implications allow.

The July and August issues of the JCM were notable because many published articles included several references to previous publications by Dr. Bugiardini, the editor of JCM. Irrespectively of the topic of the article, the same 4-5 references were quoted generally in association to a short paragraph often on cardiovascular diseases among women. A similar pattern, but on a smaller scale, was present also in earlier issues since mid-2011. It seemed very unlikely that the authors of these articles, all of a sudden and independently, had decided to quote the same articles published by the editor, articles unrelated to the main theme of the publication. It was then that an American investigator (Dr. Hennebry) realized that what had been published represented a manipulation of his work and denounced it as *“the most egregious act of scientific malpractice I have encountered in my academic career”*. This letter, see copy at the bottom, was followed by several others – all in our possession – denouncing the same events. What Dr. Hennebry has written has just been confirmed in writing by the corresponding author, Dr. Gupta. Another author, Dr. Kisalev from Russia, manifested his disappointment and did not understand what has happened. And so on.

Between mid-July and early August several key people - in the JCM, in the Federation of Italian Cardiology (FIC) which owns the Journal, and in the office of the publisher – were informed in various ways about what was going on. This is extremely important in light of the potential legal implications and responsibilities. Indeed, instead of acting immediately by taking control of the Journal and thus preempting the possible continuation of the scam in the subsequent issues, nothing happened and the perpetrator(s) continued to manipulate articles already accepted for publication.

This leads us to the September issue of JCM, an issue characterized by further downhill evolution. In this issue, several articles quote – totally out of context – a large number of publications by one of us (Peter J. Schwartz) who was probably selected as the Italian cardiologist with the highest h-index. This ill-conceived and childish action is nonetheless a gross and malevolent attempt to mud the waters. We have several letters by authors of these articles (enclosed below are one by Dr. Ertas, and one by Dr. Ozdogan, both from Turkey). It is obvious that the September issue could be published only thanks to the continued lack

of action of those who had been informed. This omission will be highly relevant when the potential legal consequences of these events will be examined. These are the facts.

As to the motives underlying this scam, it does not escape us that during the last year an important change was introduced in the criteria for the selection of University Professors (both for the candidates and for the examiners) in Italy. This change, meant to provide an objective assessment on the quality of scientific production, introduced the h-index as one of the important parameters. Independently of the merit of the change (there are limits to any parameter), it was and is a clear attempt to prevent individuals with an excessively modest scientific activity to either reach important academic positions or to control the selection of the candidates. It is quite evident that what the last 3 issues of the JCM have done was to attempt to discredit the new selection system, to unfairly increase the h-index of certain individuals, and to cast doubts on the validity of the h-index. The attempt will be easily voided by limiting the h-index for the current academic selections in Italy to the values achieved in 2011, but the consequences of what has happened go well beyond petty attempts to manipulate the academic selection in Italy.

Major damage has been made to institutions and individuals in good faith. The JCM has been discredited and it is questionable if it will ever recover; this is a major blow for the serious attempt by Italian Cardiology to have a reputable Journal in English. This, by the way, could represent a financial loss for the two Societies (SIC and ANMCO) which, through FIC, own the Journal; they could be entitled to compensation. The universal h-index would be affected, albeit modestly, unless the 3 infamous issues are not “eliminated” by the system; and this is a responsibility of the publisher. The Authors, who after having had their good work accepted for publication in a legitimate journal now realize that what has actually been published is a complete distortion of their work which clearly questions their scientific competence, are very seriously damaged and will demand that the publisher prints very soon a retraction of what was published in JCM this summer together with their original text, and this means 3 new issues – at considerable expense. Finally, the largest and perhaps irreversible damage has been made to the credibility of Italian Cardiology as a whole. In different ways, most Italian cardiologists will now have to confront a wave of skepticism about every scientific contribution made from Italy and whereas senior cardiologists who had been respected so far will suffer less, the young cardiologists who still have to create their own reputation will find an uphill road. Last, but not least, this situation has already caught the attention of the informal group of editors of the leading Journals of Cardiology, headed by Professor Karl Swedberg in Sweden, which meets regularly to monitor ethical issues and scientific frauds involving cardiology journals.

There is no more time for squabbles. Those of us who are Editorial Board Members and who have signed this letter will automatically resign on August 31 from the Journal of Cardiovascular Medicine in the absence of the immediate dismissal of the current editor and of a formal clarification of these events. We also believe it extremely important that the

respected international members of the Editorial Board are fully informed about what has happened and realize where the responsibilities lie and the lack of complicity by all or most of the Italian cardiologists. However, it seems to us more appropriate that FIC regains control on the situation and takes upon itself the responsibility of informing directly, without any ambiguity (because at this late stage no cover-up is possible, and we would not accept it), all the foreign Deputy Editors, Consulting Editors, and International Associate Editors. This is a face-saving opportunity that should not be lost. We expect FIC, as owner of the Journal and as one of the major victims of what has happened, to act immediately (even though a crash meeting of their Board of Directors should have already been convened weeks ago). We expect Wolters Kluwer to explain the lack of supervision and amend, by prompt action, the damage created by these 3 issues. It will not escape the publisher that their excellent reputation is in serious jeopardy. We hope and trust that all those involved will do what they must, now.

Sincerely,

Giuseppe Ambrosio

Eloisa Arbustini

Alberto Balbarini

Leonardo Bolognese

Angelo Branzi

Paolo Camici

Alessandro Capucci

Franco Chiarella

Filippo Crea

Raffaele De Caterina

Germano Di Sciascio

Antonello Ganau

Paolo Golino

Sabino Iliceto

Federico Lombardi

Attilio Maseri

Maria Grazia Modena

Luigi Oltrona Visconti

Luigi Padeletti

Pasquale Perrone Filardi

Peter J. Schwartz

Gaetano Thiene

Bruno Trimarco

Corrado Vassanelli

**The following are the texts of just 4 of the several letters by the Authors damaged by the scam.**

*1) It has come to my attention that an article of which I was the effective senior author of and was submitted to and accepted by the Journal of Cardiovascular Medicine was substantially altered*

*after acceptance. More than ten references were added and these have NO connection to the subject matter. These additional references do not enhance the publication and were not approved by the authors. Review of the two attached documents should provide irrefutable evidence. I am aware errors occur, however many of the added references share similar authors suggesting this was not an error.*

*I view this as the most egregious act of scientific malpractice I have encountered in my academic career. I trust you shall investigate this matter.*

**Thomas A Hennebry, MB BCH BAO, FSCAI, FSVM, FACC**  
*University of Oklahoma HSC & VA Medical Center, Oklahoma City, OK, USA*

*2) I was really surprised by print version of our article. I send you the preprint version of this article approved by us. I do not understand how there were references 32 and more. This is probably some sort of error of the publisher. Publisher did not send us the published version of the article.*

*I am disappointed that our article was published in this form!*

**Anton Kiselev**  
*Leading Researcher, Saratov Research Institute of Cardiology, Saratov, Russia*

*3) Please enclosed find my manuscripts which I have downloaded from Pubmed and manuscript submission system. The references are totally different and the references which are published in Pubmed are not mine. Journals must implement their strategies in a legal way.*

**Gökhan Ertas, MD Assistant Prof.**  
*Bezmialem University Faculty of Medicine, Department of Cardiology, Istanbul/Turkey*

*4) My article was accepted by JCM in 02.2010 but it was published after two years; however there are important differences with the case that I have submitted. There are many unrelated references. These references are not my references and as you can understand they are totally unrelated references.*

*How could the journal change my article and add these unrelated references without my knowledge? I need explanation about this situation.*

**Oner Ozdogan, MD**  
*Cardiology Department, Tepecik Training and Research Hospital, Izmir, Turkey*