

PLAGIARISM

It is a privilege to write the editorial for the maiden issue of Journal of Medical College, Chandigarh. As with any new project, there have been teething problems, but with a dedicated team of thorough professionals we have been able to surmount these hurdles and this journal has seen the light of the day. I would like to express my sincere thanks to the members of the editorial team for their efforts and inputs and for their unending support in making and shaping this journal. The publication of this journal is another step forward in the growth of our institution, which has already attained an overall rank of 14 amongst over 300 medical colleges in our country within a short span of twenty years since its inception. It will be our endeavour to encourage faculty and students from the region to use this journal to publish their original work which would be delving on pertinent local and regional issues and will be of interest to medical fraternity of the region and the nation.

We have created a page (http://gmch.gov.in/journalgmch/journal_main.htm) on the college website, which has all the details regarding the journal, its scope, the editorial process, types of articles that may be submitted, instructions to authors, contact information and various downloadable forms in a PDF format to facilitate the submission of papers. We welcome submissions through email at editor.jmcc@gmail.com.

At this point, I think it is important to delve on the issue of plagiarism which is a matter of great concern and importance for both - the uninitiated student community as well as faculty (teachers and researchers), so that they do not inadvertently indulge in plagiarism and lend themselves to legal scrutiny and action.

The word plagiarism comes from the Latin word '*Plagiarius*' (literally meaning kidnapper), and is used to denote someone stealing someone else's work, words, ideas without attributing it to the original source. A recent study published in the Annals of Internal Medicine revealed that one out of every 20 residency applications to the Harvard Teaching Hospital were found to be plagiarized,¹ reflecting the enormity of the problem even in non-scientific, non-publishing strata. The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) in its Guidelines on Good Publication Practice,² defines plagiarism as "*the unreferenced use of others' published and unpublished ideas, including research grant applications to submission under "new" authorship of a complete paper...*" It is further stated that (plagiarism) "*may occur at any stage of planning, research, writing, or publication.*"

In general, plagiarism is seen across the board – it is a phenomenon that is not restricted to the medical fraternity or to the research community. I am sure that we are aware of the plagiarism that exists in the music industry, and it is quite common even in Literature, Arts, etc. The English dramatist Ben Johnson described it as plagiary – someone guilty of literary theft. But we, as academicians, need to realize the dangers, methods of detection and means of avoiding plagiarism.

Research and publications are important since they reflect the 'academic worth' of a person. In addition, they are also important when publications are a compulsory pre-requisite for appointment on jobs or promotions, and the adage '*Publish or perish*' is well known to all. For this reason, there is a constant effort on the part of academicians to have a good number of publications, and it is this desire to be recognized that probably compels some of them to indulge in plagiarism.³

According to the Wikipedia, other than the all too familiar "lifting" of another persons' material and presenting it as one's own, plagiarism can be of a variety of types where only the author's name is mentioned without giving complete information of the source of the material, citing is done but text that has been copied word-for-word is not put within quotation mark, etc. Even borrowing from one's own previous works (self-stealing) is considered plagiarism.^{3,4}

The concept of self-stealing (self-plagiarism), also known as "recycling fraud," is interesting. The term self-plagiarism seems to be an oxymoron, because by definition, plagiarism is the use of others' material. Not many are aware of this form of plagiarism, and may be indulging in it unintentionally.⁵

Recognizing plagiarism can be difficult. With the information explosion that the internet has brought, a large amount of data can be accessed easily, making it easy to copy and modify previously published articles in the race to garner more and more numbers of publications in the shortest possible time. However, the very technology that has made plagiarism easier has also started providing editors and researchers the means to detect plagiarism through software programs. Some of these are available on line, for example, www.plagiarismchecker.com and www.duplichecker.com. These programs subject the manuscripts to an in-depth search against millions of similar articles available online to check for plagiarism. Other sites also contain database of highly similar articles (plagiarized and duplicate), and it is surprising to see that well-known names and institutes also figure in such lists.

Today, the scientific community abhors plagiarism as unethical and unacceptable. At times, plagiarism may be unintentional, where an author is not clear about the proper / acceptable research and publication guidelines, or is ignorant of the proper forms of citation. However, many times, it is done intentionally, with the aim of publishing as many papers as possible in the shortest possible time. One must realize that such actions are open to punitive action, and can affect one's career and reputation adversely.

It is pertinent to explain/clarify the issues appearing again and again point-wise:

1. Copying large portions of text verbatim will have an additional rider to obtain prior permission from the copyright owner, even if proper acknowledgement is given in the article.
2. Citing is an expression, that your work is getting support, by the work already carried out.
3. Plagiarism apart from being unethical is also copyright violation and the person found indulging in plagiarism can be held legally responsible and can be penalised.
4. Science is strong observations, validated experimentally and reproducible at any given time. Each one of us should have an apt approach towards science and should be innovative in our ideas. Plagiarism is a threat to the very fabric of science and shall never be practiced at any cost.

Those who indulge in plagiarism have inherent desire to be recognised/ noticed in an intellectual field early. They are in a hurry to have quick name and fame with least work and can be equated with criminals indulging in white collar crime. This fast track approach of "cut, copy and paste" should be shunned. The earlier we learn the better. We should try to enrich scientific literature with our own innovative ideas and expressions. Finally, let us promise to be good researchers. Originality and innovativeness in research must be practiced and maintained.

C S Gautam

Professor and Head,
Department of Pharmacology,
Government Medical College & Hospital,
Chandigarh 160 030 India
csgautam_06@yahoo.co.in

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