

# Plagiarism: Risks, limits and responsibilities

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The three menaces for medical writing are Falsification (to alter fraudulently), Fabrication (to construct) and Plagiarism (to copy).

Plagiarism is “to steal ideas or passages from (another’s work) and present them as one’s own”.<sup>1</sup> Plagiarism in addition to above consists of “Presenting the intellectual or creative work of other people (words, ideas, opinions, data, images, flowcharts, computer programs, etc.) as one’s own work.”<sup>2</sup>

In a typical Pakistani setup genuine researchers are very few. Most of the authors write an article under pressure and in a hurry for securing degree, promotion/classification, pay raise or for selection. This creates an ideal setup for plagiarism. This problem is not only present in Pakistan but in my opinion it is of huge magnitude all over the world. Net has brought medical literature into our homes and at our study tables. It is ease but it is also disease. It is difficult to resist temptation to copy when one finds exact match to the original idea at net search

I will use an example of an article received for Pakistan Journal of Physiology from a Pakistani author on January 26, 2007. The title of this article was “Effects of exercise on pulsed doppler measurements of left ventricular ejection in normal men of different ages”. After Routine cursory look it was sent to two Subject Specialists and one Statistical reviewer along with the journal check lists on February 02, 2007. One of the reviewers sent an email within two days. The email read as follows “Dear Editor, I feel this work has not been carried out in the setting mentioned. Similarly unlike most of the local articles “English” is very good. I am not pointing to anything in particular, but please make sure to secure properly signed undertaking from the authors as I smell a rat.”

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This alerted me. I simply scrolled through the article. Selected a most suitable paragraph & started investigating with the help of two web sites. The first one was “eTblast” (<http://invention.swmed.edu/etblast/index.shtml>) while the second was “scholar google” ([www.Scholar.google.com](http://www.Scholar.google.com)). Within minutes I found an article that was more than 90% similar to the suspected article.

I classify Net Plagiarizers into two types.

*Type-I: Cut & Paste Plagiarizer:* They use multiple abstracts. Their script lacks continuity (ongoing dialogue) and they are generally those who do not know that it is unethical (...criminal!)

*Type-II: Whole Article Plagiarizer:* They select an article from an unfamiliar journal and intelligently modify it. They know it is unethical but take a calculated risk.

In my opinion the defence against net plagiarism is possible by combination of the following

- a) Knowledgeable Reviewers
- b) Alert Editor and
- c) Net itself

My definition for “Knowledgeable Reviewers” in this case is those who specifically know about levels of plagiarism, latest trends in plagiarism and modern tools to counter plagiarism. To get this type of reviewers refresher courses and proper checklists are required. Outline of Refreshers can be basic knowledge about plagiarism (What’s plagiarism?), How to avoid plagiarism, How to “give credit”? What not to cite & common misconceptions.

My definition for Alert Editor is a person who suspects everyone especially:

1. First time submitters
2. Very frequent submitters
3. Frequent submitters submitting on diverse topics
4. Where methodology & Institutional capabilities do not match
5. Where there is no mistake of medical writing, no mistake of statistics
6. A script that lacks continuity of text

Most of the medical journal editors either lack expertise to detect plagiarism or they are themselves not clear about the types and limits of

plagiarism. A number of editors of smaller journals try to grab whatever article comes their way to keep their journal alive. Similarly a lot of authors, reviewers and editors still believe that while 'using references' in introduction and discussion the 'text must remain same' as in the original article. I advise everyone who is on editorial board of any big or small journal to carefully read a lot of very informative material on WAME (World association of medical editors) website.

The net resources of help can be selected from a number of websites. There are non specific ones (like "google.com") and there are the specific ones like (<http://invention.swmed.edu/etblast/index.shtml> and [www.scholar.google.com](http://www.scholar.google.com))

Recently some of the cases became very famous. The notorious Punjab University plagiarism case from center for High Energy Physics that is being published a lot in the press, forced resignation of the Professor of International Islamic University Islamabad, that of an Associate Professor and his PhD Research Scholar from University of Sindh, Jamshoro and of about 56 pending cases with HEC. But very few know that penalties can be placed on the journals and editors as well

My message is to beat net based plagiarism with net itself. If we use net properly then we have access to the same material that the plagiariser used

### **References**

1. Collins Paperback Dictionary. New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India;2002
2. SU School of Information Studies, Statement on Academic Integrity, <http://istweb.syr.edu/courses/advising/integrity.asp>