

The Author's Response:

Educating Researchers and Editors: Contributing to Ethical Publication Activity

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We are pleased to know that our recent report on publication activity in Kazakhstan (1) attracted attention of our colleagues, who commented on it and contacted us to share their impressions. Admittedly, we did not explore a variety of possible solutions to the numerous problems. It seems that the challenges of poor English writing, plagiarism, difficulties with choosing quality target journals, and 'predatory' publishing are widespread. However, there aren't precise figures to compare, for example, the prevalence of text plagiarism in Kazakhstan and elsewhere in the world. The same refers to predatory publishing, which is a relatively new problem for research evaluation and academic promotion in Kazakhstan and other Eurasian countries. We may analyze and compare the numbers of articles, which have been published by authors from different countries in predatory Open-Access journals delisted from Scopus and Web of Science. But, again, the resultant absolute figures will not reflect the real picture of wasteful publishing. Experts in publications advise to check the lists of suspended journals (2). However, information about reasons and dates of discontinued indexing is scarce, not widely distributed, and not linked to already processed articles, which may add uncertainties in any related analysis. Many actively indexed Open-Access and subscription journals continue producing redundant, erroneous, plagiarized, and incomprehensible journal articles without correcting response measures. Adding to the complexity, students continue their studies by preparing mediocre annotations while their supervisors copy and publish textbooks and didactic lectures for local unwitting audience. There is only one case of plagiarized and retracted original article from Kazakhstan, which we found in PubMed and presented in the index report. Possibly, the growing online access and readers' attentiveness will result in more retractions (3). But inevitable delays with the process of retrac-

tion will hardly change the situation overnight. Students and young researchers, who are unaware of what constitute unethical and erroneous research reporting, will continue repeating their mentors' mistakes and producing wasteful articles. Therefore, one of the much desirable measures at the current stage is to arrange effective research and writing courses for under- and postgraduates by skilled, ethical, and internationally recognized professionals. Such training courses may be helpful not only for the medical community of Kazakhstan, but also for other professional communities in the country and elsewhere in the region.

Currently, Kazakh research administrators, researchers, and authors are aggressively targeted by foreign brokering agencies, offering services of their editors and promising 'gold' publications in indexed English journals. Such an aggressive brokering campaign is a real threat to the growing publication activity in the region (4). Some of the authors 'cooperate' with the agencies to get 'easy and fast' academic credits unaware of what is an indexed journal and types of misconduct they encounter. Of course, the 'pressure to publish' is at play here, and research administrators should be held responsible for demanding numbers and unrealistic scientific production. Journal editors, in turn, publishing without quality peer review and substantive editing and seeking profits at the expense of professionalism should be also held accountable for perpetuating the circles of problems. We believe that firm action against unethical brokering, careful evaluation of what and where is published, and crediting useful and ethically cited articles, regardless of the numbers, could be a solution to some of the discussed problems. More efforts and investments for improving the quality of local university-affiliated journals and bulletins could be also helpful.

Most Kazakh bulletins are not attractive for authors because of their low visibility and absence of any indexing services. That particular problem lies partly with the editors and publishers, who are reluctant to implement the 'real' peer review, improve publishing standards, and apply to Scopus and other indexing and archiving organizations. Improving credentials of local editors by providing access to updated editorial guidelines, arranging outcome-oriented trainings, and regulating their relationships with authors, reviewers, and other editors with advanced skills could be another major step toward ethical publication activity in the country.

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