



Letter to the Editor:

Plagiarism in Scientific Writings: Is There Any Way Out?

To the Editor:

I read with interest the editorial titled 'Plagiarism Continues to Affect Scholarly Journals' written by Hong ST, Editor in Chief, and published in the February issue of the esteemed *Journal of Korean Medical Science* (1). Having gone through the editorial, I have the following comments:

The 3 cases which came into light in a span of 4–5 years may represent a tip of the iceberg with a potential of more cases not being caught/reported. Instances of plagiarism in scientific writings will continue to occur unabated unless concrete steps are taken at various levels. The following measures are suggested to curb the menace of plagiarism in the near future:

- 1) Increasing awareness: for the readers and aspiring authors about ill effects of plagiarism on scholarly publications by publishing articles on the relevant issues of plagiarism as frequently as possible.
- 2) A clear and definitive policy: on plagiarism, easily visible in the 'Instructions to Authors,' for every journal. A 'Zero Tolerance' approach may be considered appropriate.
- 3) An author certificate: may preferably endorse that the manuscript is free from plagiarism and be countersigned by the immediate administrative head of the corresponding author.
- 4) Increased surveillance: every article submitted to a journal, should ideally be subjected to checking for plagiarism by the best possible professional software available. It is important to understand here, that, even the best of software based plagiarism detection tools (PDT) also have certain limitations. Most PDT works by matching texts from several billion internet resources and documents. A basic requirement for any source to be detected by a particular PDT is that the particular source needs to be available in the existing database of the PDT service provider, which depends on the following factors:
 - a) How old or recent is the source? As numerous new publications are added and updated on a daily basis on the internet, it is virtually impossible to keep track of all latest publications and update and archive them in the da-

tabase of the PDT service provider instantly. Hence, at any point of time, there would be some recent publications that are not yet archived in the database of the PDT and hence would not be recognized.

- b) There may be a database where subscriptions are necessary for access, in which case availability of such resources in the PDT database depends on the subscription status.
- c) Permission for web crawling and accessing contents of a database by a PDT service provider is at the discretion of the concerned database owner/controller. Therefore, if a specific resource/database does not allow web crawling of its contents by a particular PDT, then the PDT will not be able to recognize such documents for similarity check.

Plagiarism is difficult to completely eradicate from scholarly publications. However, we can certainly reduce the incidences of plagiarism by concerted efforts from all stakeholders. 1) Time bound investigation and definitive course of action as per international norms for suspected cases of plagiarism. 2) Low threshold for retraction for confirmed cases of plagiarism in a particular journal. 3) Creation of a common platform for reporting confirmed cases of plagiarism and action taken there in. Nominal roll of blacklisted/punished authors may also be made available on the common platform, so that the data is available for all concerned. 4) Administrative and regulatory authority be given to international ethical bodies like Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), World Association of Medical Editors (WAME), which can initiate punitive action as per international norms.

DISCLOSURE

The authors have no potential conflicts of interest to disclose.

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REFERENCE

1. Hong ST. Plagiarism continues to affect scholarly journals. *J Korean Med Sci* 2017; 32: 183-5.

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Received: 3 April 2017 / Accepted: 30 April 2017