

Duplicate publication: a joint statement from the Singapore Medical Journal and the Medical Journal of Malaysia

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We, the Editors of the Singapore Medical Journal (SMJ) and the Medical Journal of Malaysia (MJM), have noted a number of duplicate submissions to our respective journals over the recent year. This is a dishonest and unethical practice that is deplored by editors of medical and scientific journals. In addition, we feel that punitive measures should be applied to authors found guilty of duplicate publication, in order to discourage this undesirable practice. Both the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICJME) and the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) have issued policy statements about duplicate publications.^(1,2)

Duplicate (or dual or redundant) publication refers to the publication of the same data in two or more different journals; or the simultaneous or near simultaneous publication of identical or closely-related articles of similar content, or a review on the same subject, in different journals. Duplicate publication can be considered deliberate particularly if the authors fail to cite their previous publication, presumably for fear of discovery of their deceit.⁽¹⁻⁴⁾ Publication refers to material that has already appeared in print or electronic media. Like most biomedical journals, the SMJ and MJM will not consider manuscripts that are being simultaneously considered by other journals. This policy aims at avoiding: (1) the potential for disagreement should two journals claim the right to publish a manuscript that had been simultaneously submitted to two different journals, and (2) the possibility that two or more journals unknowingly and unnecessarily undertake the work of peer review, editing, processing and publishing the same manuscript.⁽¹⁾ The SMJ and MJM processes submitted manuscripts on the understanding that they are submitted exclusively to only one journal. In addition, all submissions must be accompanied by a completed copyright assignment form which should be signed by all authors.

Journal readers should be able to trust that what they are reading is original. Duplicate publication may result in problems relating to the cost-effective use of resources, is ethically immoral, and infringes upon

copyright laws. Redundant publication of original research can result in inadvertent double counting or inappropriate weighting of the findings of a single study, distorting the available evidence.⁽¹⁾ Scientific investigators and authors have a responsibility to ensure that duplication does not occur. All investigators of a study should have a clear understanding of how and where the results of their research will be reported. Ideally, only one manuscript should be produced and submitted. If the intention is to write more than one manuscript, then care must be taken to ensure that there is a substantially distinct difference between the manuscripts.⁽⁴⁾

A manuscript that has already been rejected by another journal is not considered to be a duplicate submission. Neither is a complete report that follows publication of a preliminary report, such as an abstract or poster that has been presented at a professional meeting, provided it has not been published in full nor is being considered for publication in the meeting proceedings, whether in print or electronically.⁽¹⁾ Although previous publication of an abstract does not preclude subsequent submission for publication, it is prudent for authors to make full disclosure to the journal editor at the time of submission.

There may be some grey areas, for example, the republication of a paper in another language, the publication of extended abstracts (particularly those containing tables, illustrations and references) in conference proceedings, and official reports of funded research. It is therefore a good practice for authors, at the time of manuscript submission, to disclose details of related papers they have authored, even if in a different language, similar papers in press, and any closely-related papers previously published or currently under review at another journal.⁽²⁾ The journal editor can then be better positioned to advise as to whether the submitted manuscript represents a potential duplicate publication.

Journalists attending scientific meetings at which preliminary research findings are presented, may prematurely publish these findings in the mass media.

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Editors may choose to deliberately publish material that is also being published in another journal. This is known as secondary publication and aims at reaching the widest possible audience. Types of these articles include guidelines produced by government bodies or professional organisations, or editorials such as this one. Certain conditions should be met for secondary publications, the most important being obtaining agreement of all the authors and approval from the editors of both journals.⁽¹⁾

If duplicate publication is attempted or occurs without proper notification, authors should expect editorial action to be taken. The editors of SMJ and MJM, sometimes with the assistance of their

editorial teams, will conduct initial fact-finding, including correspondence with the authors for their explanations. An investigating panel comprising editorial board members may be convened. If the inquiry concludes that duplicate publication had indeed occurred and if the manuscript is still being processed, it will be promptly rejected. If the article has already been published, then a notice of duplicate publication may be published in each of the affected journals. A formal letter of reprimand will be sent to the author, copied to the heads of the author's department and institution, together with the evidence collected by the journal. The SMJ and MJM will send copies of this letter to each other and also to the editor of the Annals Academy of Medicine Singapore. The author will be further informed that both the SMJ and MJM will no longer be interested in considering his or her future submissions. We believe that these actions reflect the seriousness of the offence.

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