



**Committee on
Publication Ethics**



Cases of suspected misconduct submitted to COPE

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www.publicationethics.org.uk

What is COPE?

- **Founded in April 1997 by Mike Farthing (Editor of Gut) and Richard Smith (Editor of the BMJ)**
- **Initially, to provide a discussion forum for Editors on how best to deal with possible breaches in research and publication ethics**



What is COPE?

- **There is no national body to monitor and advise on research misconduct**
- **1999: publication of guidelines on good publication practice**
- **2000: COPE matures with elected chair, vice-chair, treasurer and council officers, and a constitution**



What is COPE?

- **2004/5: launched new website and a Code of conduct for editors**
- **Publishes an annual report of anonymised cases and outcomes**
- **Acts as a database on research misconduct**
- **Provides advice for ~200 member journals**



What is COPE?

- **Considers and offers advice on ~30 cases a year**
- **Has no statutory powers**



Objectives and Design

- **Description of nature and main concerns of all cases discussed at COPE from its inception in April 1997 to September 2004**
- **Analysis of cases and outcomes (when reported) from published COPE reports and, for 2004, from COPE meeting minutes**



Results

Year	No. of cases
1997	16
1998	33
1999	27
2000	32
2001	39
2002	18
2003	22
2004	25*
Total	212

*incomplete



Problems / dilemmas discussed*



Results (outcomes)

- **212 cases: 132 (63%) pre- and 72 (34%) post-publication (8 not applicable)**
- **In most (159; 75%), Committee felt that there were sufficient concerns to pursue cases further**
- **In 79 cases (37%), outcomes following advice by COPE and further actions by editors were published (1998–2003)**



Results (outcomes)

Type	Total	Exonerated	Impasse	Contact institution	Lasted >1 yr
Redundancy	33	7	3	4	48%
Unethical research	16	5	4	7	25%
Fraud	13	2	2	4	62%
Clinical malpractice	10	0	4	6	70%
Plagiarism	7	2	2	2	14%
Total (%)	79	16 (20)	15 (19)	23 (29)	36 (46)



Conclusions

- **Wide spectrum of suspected research and publication misconduct (COPE an educational repository of cases)**
- **Substantial no. of cases pre-publication (potential prevention of misconduct)**
- **Reporting of outcomes (incomplete): investigations time-consuming and often unsatisfactory outcome**

