

Abstract presented to the meeting Research on Research Integrity, Washington DC, November 18–20, 2000, Office of Research Integrity

The work of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)

The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) is an informal group founded in 1997 as a response to growing anxiety about the integrity of authors submitting studies to medical journals. Founded by British medical editors—including those of the *BMJ*, *Gut*, and *The Lancet*—the committee had five aims:

- (1) To advise on cases brought by editors. Cases are presented anonymously, and full responsibility for action remains with the reporting editor. The cases relate to advertising, authorship, confidentiality, conflict of interest, editorial freedom, editorial integrity, media relations, patient privacy, peer review, redundant publication, research ethics, and research misconduct. The committee has so far considered over 100 cases. Some of them have been serious fraud; most have been more minor. Several cases have been referred to regulatory bodies like Britain's General Medical Council. A full analysis, together with case studies, will be presented at the conference.
- (2) Publish an annual report on the cases it considers. The committee has published two annual reports and set up a website (www.publicationethics.org.uk) A third annual report will be published in the winter of 2000.
- (3) Draft guidance on these issues. The committee drafted guidelines and after extensive consultation published them in 1999. They have been adopted by many journals.
- (4) Promote research into publication ethics. Nothing has been achieved so far.
- (5) Consider offering teaching and training. The committee has run two seminars, and individual members of the committee have lectured and taught on research misconduct.

COPE has also been concerned to ensure that the scientific community in Britain responds to research misconduct. Britain has now had several high profile cases of research misconduct but has yet to make a coherent response to the problem. Several bodies, including the Royal Society and the General Medical Council, are currently considering the problem, and COPE has been important both in spurring these bodies to action and in contributing to a response.

COPE might have proved a temporary body, but members of the committee judge that its work must continue. It is thus now going through a process of formalising its structure and constitution.

Mike Farthing, editor, *Gut*; chairman of COPE

Richard Horton, editor, *The Lancet*

Richard Smith, editor, *BMJ*

Alex Williamson, publishing director, BMJ Publishing Group