

## Foreword: COPE continues to flourish

COPE has had another good year. During 2003 the main committee considered over 30 new cases, and we continue to receive follow up on cases considered in previous years. These are detailed in the dedicated case section of this report. COPE Council has also decided to review cases that have been submitted by authors and editors, but which do not follow the standard COPE format. Some of these cases have been instrumental in developing our thoughts about editorial misconduct and the need for a code of practice for editors. Authors have written to us, alleging poor editorial practice, and “whistle blowing”; editors have also drawn our attention to possible editorial misconduct with respect to the manipulation of impact factors. Although the work of the main committee still centres around requests for help from other editors on research and publication misconduct, the Council has found it extremely helpful to consider issues beyond its standard remit. These cases are also included in this year’s report (pp. 63–8).

Two important issues were debated at the annual COPE seminar in October: “How do we deliver a Council for Research Integrity in the UK?” and “Editorial Accountability.” The first debate picked up the long running saga of the continuing reluctance in the UK to set up a national body to monitor and advise on research misconduct. Stephen Lock, immediate past editor of the *British Medical Journal* began with an overview. Stephen has campaigned for almost two decades for a UK wide approach to research misconduct along the lines of initiatives in North America and many other European countries. Contributions from other major stakeholders, including the Academy of Medical Sciences, Universities UK, NHS Research and Development, and the General Medical Council raised various issues and added several perspectives to the debate, although no individual stakeholder was prepared to take the lead on

setting up a national body. During the final discussion it was suggested that perhaps the two major employers, Universities UK and the NHS, might jointly set up a working group to plan the way forward. I am optimistic that this approach will eventually be successful.

Richard Smith led the second debate, with an exploration of the duties of an editor and how these might fall short of expectations, and amount to editorial misconduct. The contributions of Andrew Herxheimer, Iain Chalmers, and Doug Altman both challenged and inspired. Sara Schroter summarised her research on editorial conflict of interest. In essence, this indicated that many editors have a poor understanding of the concept and certainly don’t widely recognise that this might have anything to do with them. Richard Smith had produced a draft Code of Conduct for Editors, which provided an excellent focus for discussion and will be developed further through wide consultation.

In 2004 COPE will need to hold elections for its Chair and Vice Chair. The call for nominations will go out early in the New Year, with a view to holding an election under the auspices of the Electoral Reform Society. Our Treasurer, Alex Williamson, who has a five year period of office, will continue to serve until 2006.

COPE still has a great deal of work to do. There is no evidence that business is declining: editors still seem to want to consult us when they are faced with difficult cases of possible research and publication misconduct. COPE’s research and training agenda is still in its infancy, but will have increasing influence in the next year or so. And COPE will continue to support the need for the development of a Council for Research Integrity in the UK.

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