

Session I: How do we deliver a Council for Research Integrity in the UK? (Chair: Michael Farthing)

Introduction

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The seminar programme is divided into two distinct but related sections. The first follows on from last year's seminar, when we discussed how to take forward the idea of a Council for Research Integrity. The second was inspired by comments from Professor Sir Peter Lachman, who felt that editors were doing very little to regulate their own conduct and that perhaps they should set their own house in order before taking authors/researchers to task.

But why are we once again discussing how to make real progress? History is instructive.

What does history tell us?

Despite several high profile cases of biomedical research misconduct after the Second World War, the scale of the problem had not been systematically assessed. But in 1988 Stephen Lock, who was then editor of the *BMJ*, published the results of a survey of clinical academics in the journal.¹

This indicated that there was rather more scientific misconduct than perhaps anyone had been prepared to believe, and that most of it was concealed.

In 1993 he and Frank Wells published the first edition of *Fraud and Misconduct in Biomedical Research*,² which provided an international perspective and described how the US and some European countries had begun to tackle the problem.

Importantly, in the second edition, published only three years later, the authors called for an independent investigating authority to look into allegations of research misconduct.³

This was precisely because they recognised the difficulties of conducting investigations behind closed doors without any attempt to move the process into the public domain.

In 1996 a group of editors from several major general and specialist medical journals became concerned about the number of breaches of research and publication ethics they came across during their work. The diversity of issues arising from these breaches exposed their lack of expertise in handling these cases.

The foundations of COPE

These concerns gave rise to the birth of COPE, which was founded as a self help group for editors in 1997. Richard Smith's editorial in the *BMJ* formed the basis for the first COPE seminar in 1998.

When COPE published its *Guidelines on Good Publication Practice* the following year, these highlighted just how powerless editors were to deal with alleged research misconduct.

The guidelines suggest that editors should take a stronger stance. Rather than just reject papers, they should report their concerns to employers. However, experience over the past five years has indicated that employers do not always act on referrals from editors.

1999 was the year of a consensus conference on research misconduct, chaired by Lord Robert Kilpatrick, at the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. The major stakeholders at this meeting included the royal colleges regulatory and educational bodies, the Association of British Pharmaceutical Industry, and the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine.⁴

Some very important conclusions were reached, chief among which was that "a national panel should be established—with public representation—to provide advice and assistance on request."

Furthermore, it was concluded that this panel might:

- Develop and promote models of good practice for local implementation
- Provide assistance with the investigation of alleged research misconduct
- Collect, collate, and publish information on incidents of research misconduct.

The role of investigating cases would, however, remain the responsibility of employers.

It was left to the three colleges of physicians and the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine to meet with the General Medical Council and co-opt other partners to consider the remit of such a panel.

Since then, there has been remarkably little progress. Several informal meetings, including one in February 2002, at the Royal College of Physicians, hosted by Sir George Alberti. Once again, all the major stakeholders attended, and at that point, the Academy of Medical Sciences was charged to progress the initiative.

The Academy did a substantial amount of work, but now feels that it does not have the resources to take on what is clearly a substantial responsibility.

We had very clear guidance from the consensus meeting that we have still not yet delivered. Our lack of progress is becoming embarrassing, particularly as many countries in Europe have addressed this issue.

1 Lock S. Misconduct in medical research: does it exist in Britain? *BMJ* 1988; 297: 1531–5.

2 Lock S, Wells F. *Fraud and Misconduct in Biomedical Research*. London: BMJ Books, 1993.

3 Lock S, Wells F. *Fraud and Misconduct in Biomedical Research*. Second Edition. London: BMJ Books, 1996.

4 Joint Consensus Conference on Misconduct in Biomedical Research Statement. 28–29 October 1999. Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh.