

# How Do We Deal with Research Misconduct?

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Dear Editor,

We read with great interest the review article published in the January issue of the *Oman Medical Journal*: "Research Misconduct: The Peril of Publish or Perish".<sup>1</sup> The article concluded that GCC countries ought to consider implementing remedial and punitive policies to deal with research misconduct; however, the question remaining is how to deal with the misconduct.

Indeed, misconduct is an unethical practice that is becoming a global challenge. Dealing with the problem should consist of both prevention and correction. While prevention is a good concept, it is usually hard and unsuccessful. Focusing on correction, the strict and single standard management of the problem is very important.<sup>2</sup> We would like to highlight some measures to manage research misconduct that have been previously proposed. Firstly, continuous education to alert all practitioners to the unacceptability of research misconduct.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, there should be a good system in place to detect the problem. The tools currently available are a source of concern due to their limitations. For example, online plagiarism screening tools might not completely detect misconduct in complex cases.

The use of several methods for early detection of the problem is important and, once detected and confirmed, there must be management of the problem. For example, notifying any affiliated institutions associated with the misconduct and following-up on their reaction is important. It should be noted that many problems are neglected by those who find them and the affiliated institutions despite official reports.<sup>4</sup> Also, corrective action from

the journal by publishing a retraction or withdrawal note should be taken. The skill of editors to identify and promptly manage the problem is also required. Nevertheless,<sup>5</sup> the responsibility to counteract this problem falls to everyone in the scientific community and collaboration within the community is important. In some cases, sanctions by the community might be necessary.<sup>6</sup> Elia et al,<sup>7</sup> recently reported that the researchers who performed a systemic review usually identified problems of misconduct in the studied works, but they usually neglected to report these. Government regulation is also mentioned as a requirement for effective problem management.<sup>8</sup>

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