

Plagiarism: How serious is this problem in Pakistan?

Madam, Of late, lot has been said and discussed about plagiarism in the international forums and the issue was discussed several times in the editorial meetings in Pakistan when some editors of medical journals came across this problem. It appears that this problem is of an equally serious magnitude in Pakistan. Understanding plagiarism is of importance especially for budding writers for medical journals who could then adopt a cautious approach.

Plagiarism is the context where one misrepresents ideas, words, computer codes or other creative expression as one's own and manifests itself in a variety of forms which include: verbatim copying, near-verbatim copying, paraphrasing sentences without citing the source or not citing the source correctly. A form of this is called "self-plagiarism" which is near-verbatim use of significant portions of one's own copyrighted work without citing the original source.¹ Many manuscripts are charged for plagiarism and there is a hot discussion among the forum members of WAME (World Association of Medical Editors) as in many instances, this problem has been detected and highlighted. A recent issue of BMJ² has discussed a case of plagiarism committed by an author of excellent repute who produced the work of another author and got it published. In Pakistan, this problem is not uncommon and many such cases are brought to the notice of editors of medical journals. Surprisingly, the people involved in this matter are usually from a higher academic echelon who had published a similar paper of their own in a local prestigious journal, which was earlier, published in an international journal. The writer's experience of reviewing the manuscripts is somewhat similar where work done and published by someone else was in toto reproduced in the manuscript while being under consideration for publication in Pakistan. According to the Duke Community Standard³ (Honor Code) rules and regulation, one is liable for charge of plagiarism if: copied from published sources without adequate documentation, purchased a pre-written paper by mail or electronically, letting some-

one else write a paper for own behalf, paying someone else to write a paper, submitting someone else's unpublished work, either with or without permission.

However, there are ways for detecting plagiarism, like: mixed citation styles, lack of references or quotations, unusual formatting, off topic, anomalies of diction and anomalies of style, which are sufficient to raise an alarm for such a possibility.⁴

There is software by the name of "Moss" which can be utilized to detect plagiarism. Moss which stands for 'Measure Of Software Similarity' is an automatic system for determining the similarity of C, C++, Java, Pascal, Ada, Lisp or Scheme programs. The algorithm behind moss is a significant improvement over other cheating detection algorithms.⁵ It is important that medical editors in Pakistan become familiar with such softwares and use it in order to prevent such manuscripts being published. It is also important to note that writers should exercise due care while preparing the manuscript and append appropriate citations and references while quoting the work done and published by others.

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References

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