

Publication Ethics and Publication Malpractice Statement

The ethics statements for our publications are based on the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors (available at <https://publicationethics.org/>). All contributors to our publications are obliged to abide by these guidelines in order to ensure a fair and ethical process of publication.

Duties of the Editors

Fair play and editorial independence

Editors evaluate submitted manuscripts solely on the basis of their academic merit (importance, originality, study's validity, clarity) and its relevance to the scope of the publication, regardless of the authors' race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, citizenship, religious beliefs, political philosophy or institutional affiliation. Decisions to edit and publish are made entirely by the publication and are not determined by the policies of governments or any other agencies outside of the publication itself.

Confidentiality

Editors and editorial staff will not disclose any information about a submitted manuscript to anyone other than the corresponding author, reviewers, potential reviewers, other editorial advisers, and the publisher, as appropriate.

Disclosure and conflicts of interest

Editors and editorial board members will not use unpublished information disclosed in a submitted manuscript for their own research purposes without the authors' explicit written consent. Privileged information or ideas obtained by editors as a result of handling the manuscript will be kept confidential and not used for their personal advantage. Editors will recuse themselves from considering manuscripts in which they have conflicts of interest resulting from competitive, collaborative, or other relationships/connections with any of the authors, companies or institutions connected to the papers; instead, they will ask another member of the editorial board to handle the manuscript.

Publication decisions

All submitted manuscripts being considered for publication undergo peer-review by reviewers who are experts in the field (refer to The Best Paper Selection Guidelines), and the decision to publish is based upon consultation with the editorial board and

reviewers.

Duties of Peer Reviewers

Peer reviewers assist editors in making editorial decisions. Referees who are invited to review research but feel unqualified or unsuitable should inform the publication of this and decline the invitation to review. Reviewers are expected to be objective and provide clear feedback for authors to use in improving the manuscript. Personal criticism of the authors is inappropriate.

Confidentiality

Any manuscripts received for review are confidential documents and must be treated as such; they must not be shown to or discussed with others. This applies also to invited reviewers who decline the review invitation.

Acknowledgement of sources

Reviewers should identify relevant published work that has not been cited by the authors. A reviewer should also notify the editors of any substantial similarity or overlap between the manuscript under consideration and any other manuscript (published or unpublished) of which they have personal knowledge.

Disclosure and conflicts of interest

Any invited referee who has conflicts of interest resulting from competitive, collaborative, or other relationships or connections with any of the authors, companies or institutions connected to the manuscript and the work described therein should immediately notify the editors to declare their conflicts of interest and decline the invitation to review so that alternative reviewers can be contacted.

Unpublished material disclosed in a submitted manuscript must not be used in a reviewer's own research without the express written consent of the authors. Privileged information or ideas obtained through peer review must be kept confidential and not used for the reviewer's personal advantage. This applies also to invited reviewers who decline the review invitation.

Duties of Authors

Reporting standards

Authors of original research should present an accurate account of the work performed

and the results, followed by an objective discussion of the significance of the work. The manuscript should contain sufficient detail and references to permit others to replicate the work. Fraudulent or knowingly inaccurate statements constitute unethical behaviour and are unacceptable.

Originality and plagiarism

Authors should ensure that they have written and submit only entirely original works, and if they have used the work and/or words of others, that this has been appropriately cited. Publications that have been influential in determining the nature of the work reported in the manuscript should also be cited. Plagiarism in all its forms constitutes unethical publishing behaviour and is unacceptable.

Disclosure and conflicts of interest

Authors should disclose any conflicts of interest that might be construed to influence the results or their interpretation in the manuscript. All sources of financial support for the work should be disclosed.

Acknowledgement of sources

Authors should ensure that they have properly acknowledged the work of others, and should also cite publications that have been influential in determining the nature of the reported work. Information obtained privately (from conversation, correspondence or discussion with third parties) must not be used or reported without explicit, written permission from the source. Authors should not use information obtained in the course of providing confidential services, such as refereeing manuscripts or grant applications, unless they have obtained the explicit written permission of the author(s) of the work involved in these services.

Peer review

Authors are obliged to participate in the peer review process and cooperate fully by responding promptly to editors' requests for raw data, clarifications, and proof of ethics approval, patient consents and copyright permissions. In the case of a first decision of "revisions necessary", authors should respond to the reviewers' comments systematically, point by point, and in a timely manner, revising and re-submitting their manuscript by the deadline given.