Commitment to Ethics in Health Researches Reviewed by Damascus University Journal for Health Sciences

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It is a refereed journal, publishing mainly original articles concerning scientific works done by educational staff and 3rd cycle students of three faculties: Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy.

Being editorial staff of a refereed scientific journal is a hard mission.
Challenges in Reviewing Articles of Health Researches

- Commitment to Research ethics.
- Investigating research misconduct
- Accuracy and authenticity of research works
- Journal requirements should be followed
Commitment to research ethics is evaluated vis-à-vis:

- Patients and other participants (volunteers, control group): respect of persons, informed consent, beneficence, and justice (Belmont report)
- Other researchers rights: colleagues, students, supervisors, and staff: Taking other’s work (Plagiarism)
- Scientific knowledge: Fabrication, and falsification (cooking research data)
No. of articles refused in the past 5 years due to non commitment to research ethics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>year</th>
<th>Reviewed Articles</th>
<th>Refused Articles</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>13 (7%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>8 (11%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>9 (9%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>22 (14%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>20 (11%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>701</td>
<td>72 (10%)</td>
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Major Reasons for Immediate Article Rejection

1. No informed consent in randomized double-blind clinical trials or placebo-controlled clinical trials (questionnaire is requested)
2. Placebo-controlled clinical trial, in existing proven therapy
3. Clinical trials with therapy of unknown results directly beginning in phase III
4. Fabrication and falsification of results (though, it is not always discovered!)
5. Plagiarism: Taking (steeling) especially a complete research work, or a large part of a research work done by other researchers:

- Student
- Colleagues
- Supervisor
- Previously published work of another author in another journal or taken from the internet (cause of punishing procedures if discovered)
Critical Areas:

- Partial plagiarism: Taking parts of others work is sometimes accepted or even offered by the colleagues for promotional purposes (limited points divided by number of authors)
- Using medical records and retrospective studies based on works done by many other colleagues, students, or supervisors.
- Stored human tissues (tissue banks): Needing No objection or patient agreement?! What about tissue from autopsies?
Critical Areas:

- Paraffin-embedded tissues: Do they belong to the patient or to the diagnostic centre? ... in many countries they belong to the patient, though we keep them for him.
- Residual liquid or tissues of routine exams done for diagnostic purposes
- Prenatal researches
- Genetic studies: A national concern?!
- Animals: No extensive torture!
Ethics committees are recently formed by the health faculties in Damascus, and all research works must be approved before they start, especially the following:

- Researches involving Human subjects, or bodily material
- Genetic researches: More attention (dangerous area)
- Researches using private information, especially wide surveys
Conclusion

- More strict commitment to principles of research ethics is requested for health researches.
- All academic health researches, especially those involving human subjects, must be reviewed and approved by ethics committees before they start.
- More attention should be given to diagnostic specimens (tissue, blood, etc…)
- Informed consent should be strict and clear in clinical trials
- Critical areas must be gradually narrowed.
- Conscience still very important in health researches to keep the others’ rights and the scientific knowledge pool clean and clear.
Thank You