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### Safe-guarding Good Scientific Practice – Is It Worth It?

*“Years ago society accorded science the privilege of governing itself. If it finds that its trust continues to be betrayed, the politicians will step by default”*

S. Lock (1)

**To the Editor:** The readers of the *Croatian Medical Journal (CMJ)* are witnesses that, long ago, the editors of the *CMJ* have placed themselves under the obligation to take actions in favor of good scientific practice, the important part of which is the good editorial practice. Their efforts to achieve this goal were, and still are, fruitful – several articles, editorials and books were published, in which the *CMJ* editors acted as educators of good scientific practice (2-4). Moreover, the *CMJ* appointed the editor for responsible conduct of research – the very first position in this part of the world. These and many other achievements (5) made the *CMJ* inspiring for

the journal editors in small scientific communities.

Sometimes, editors of scientific journals face unpleasant situations – unethical (fraudulent) behavior of each of the main actors in the publishing game – authors, reviewers, and editors. Fortunately, it seems that such events are rare. In the short history of the *CMJ*, its editors, who strictly adhere to best international scientific practices, have had the duty and obligation to correct the fraudulent literature – five cases of plagiarism (6), and they acted accordingly.

More recently, using a meta-analysis, Ian Chalmers detected two plagiarized articles of Asim Kurjak (7). After scrutinizing this author's articles published in the *CMJ*, and after consultation with World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) and the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), the *CMJ* editors retracted two plagia-

rized articles – and the affair exploded (8). Heated arguments *pro* and *contra* Asim Kurjak were published (see Rapid Responses to refs. 7 and 8, available from <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/333/7568/594> and <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/335/7627/0>). In conflict situations, taking side may be understandable; much less understandable is that the affair turned not against the violator of high ethical principles of science, but against the people whose duty is to correct fraudulent literature (9).

It is a sad situation when editors who are proven to practice and observe good editorial practice are accused of misbehavior. Perhaps it is the fate of whistleblowers (10). However, I am convinced that, in spite of this bitter experience, the editors of the *CMJ* will remain firm in their efforts to improve the ethical climate in their surroundings,

from which not only the Croatian, but also much larger scientific communities, will certainly benefit. Therefore, answering the question in the title of this letter, I decidedly say – yes!

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