

Promoting Research Integrity amid Growing Pressures

There are no lessons yet to be learned from the passing of former Cambridge professor Jason Arday.¹ This is not because there aren't any, but because many stakeholders are only beginning to unpack the complex scenario that accompanied his story. Among the issues are concerns about academic integrity, but equally important are the inquiries into the processes that accompanied the investigation of the alleged wrongdoing. This incident, though extreme, offers a sobering illustration of how questions of integrity can threaten the credibility and trust within academia and in the world of scientific research.

Integrity is a virtue not only of individuals but of institutions. One may have a smattering of elements that promote integrity: an ethical review board here, an office of research integrity there. But without the whole infrastructure aligned to a moral standard, all these small tokens are merely performative. In a paper on academic integrity, it was stated that: "Institutions must protect the practices they house, and therefore they have a duty to do something about those behaviours of their members that may corrupt or in some way harm the integrity of that practice."²

This, however, is not an easy task. The pressures of academia challenge this undertaking day in and day out. Many believe such an environment promotes misconduct.³ The challenge is how to create a culture promoting integrity in a setting that relies heavily on punishing misconduct.⁴ The approach is multi-pronged. Focusing on supporting faculty and students in an educative framework is a worthwhile undertaking that prevents and not just punishes offenses. This strategy is explicitly described in a recent paper: "As publication pressure seems to encourage competition and gamification practices, more support is needed for academics, especially for those in resource-scarce contexts. Support can be provided in the form of relief from other duties for dedicated writing time, access to writing support and technology, and ethical use of writing professionals."⁵

To contribute to the preventative aspect, the Acta Medica Philippina has undertaken editorial policy clarifications, specifically on authorship, on AI use, and on disclosures. An overhaul of the submission system was implemented, adopting the Contributor Role Taxonomy (CRediT) system, requiring declarations of conflicts of interest and use of assistive technology.

Structural reforms are needed as well. It was suggested in a recent paper that "institutionally, evaluation systems (can) shift from quantity-based to quality-focused metrics, incorporating measures of research impact and reproducibility."⁶

The punitive aspect in the control of misconduct should likewise be constructive. The use of restorative practices (RP), the understanding and building of social connections to integrate appropriate behavior and to construct healthy communities, are seen to be "fair, fostering empathy, compassion and accountability; through experiential learning opportunities."⁷ Beyond the legalistic framework, this approach espouses restorative justice, which aims "to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible."⁷

It is hoped that these measures will promote academic integrity and minimize ethically discordant behavior, ensuring that calamities such as the Wakefield debacle and the Cambridge tragedy do not recur.

In this environment, we can all strive to conduct honest research, stand on the stable bedrock of integrity, and pursue scientific discovery with plain and simple *truthfulness*.

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