

Letters to the editor

“I read with interest.....”: a sequel

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Letters—an editor’s dilemma

The *Postgraduate Medical Journal* often receives letters and comments which start with the phrase: “I read with interest”.

Perhaps this interest has stimulated the author to write of his or her own experience or to submit original data, which would not normally survive the rigours of peer review. However, at times it is the editor or the reviewer that can say that he or she: “read with interest.....”.

However, the interest arose not from the originality of the contribution or the insight of the author, but rather from the fact that the article contained large sections of text lifted from a different source with no reference to that source. This is plagiarism and sadly it has become a major issue in the submission of dissertations to universities and of original papers and reviews to academic journals. It is essentially theft of intel-

lectual property and it is also fraud. The failure to acknowledge the source of the material means that the author is seeking to claim the ideas and the text as his or her own. They are not and to do so is to deprive the original author of his or her rights to be recognised as the originator of this contribution.

During this last year the *Postgraduate Medical Journal* has seen gross plagiarism on several occasions. Fortunately these were recognised either within the editorial office or by academic referees. In one case a complete published review from *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)* was submitted by two “authors” who had made no contribution to the original article, had no contact with the original authors, and lived and worked in a different country. On another occasion the author of a case report chose to use text from the online textbook from *eMedicine* as his introduc-

tion. In neither case was there any attempt to recognise the source of this material. Such practice is unacceptable in the scientific and clinical community.

What should be the response of the editor and the editorial board? There are a number of potential actions which could be taken. These include:

- Informing the Committee on Publication Ethics.
- Informing the author’s employers, especially if an academic institute.
- Informing the professional body which regulates the author—for example, the General Medical Council.
- Placing a lifetime ban on the author in the journal.
- Publishing the name of the author.

A major purpose of this brief editorial is to encourage discussion about the way forward. How do authors and readers view plagiarism? What should be done to the plagiarist? Your views are being sought and hopefully there will be a healthy discussion on *PMJ Online*. Please email us with your views at <http://pmj.bmjournals.com/>.

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