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## **Unethical practices within medical research and publications – A narrative commentary of unreported “unethical ethics” within research communities**

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High quality science depends on efficiently planned innovative research coupled with truthful reporting. The data produced by the scientific community impacts on the academia, clinicians, and the general public; therefore, the scientific community and other regulatory bodies have been focussing on ethical code of conduct (or behaviour). Actually, the concept is built-in from the early stages of research grant application processes until the submission of the manuscripts. Many funding organisations and publishers have established their own ethical code of conduct and expecting the researchers to strictly follow this code. For example, many journals are now expecting details of author contributions, funding details, conflict of interest etc. Likewise, research councils are insisting on to ensuring consistency of the ethical approach in reporting research methodologies, patient recruitment etc. Despite these measures, unethical research, reviewing and publishing behaviours are still going on. The commonly known unethical practices include duplicate submission, falsification and/or fabrication of data, plagiarism, ghost writing, ghost authorships etc. Unfortunately, in some instances, these are being perceived as conventional research behaviours. This short paper considers some of the current unethical practices, their reasons and explores the ways to discourage these within research and other professional disciplinary bodies.

Through collegiate discussions, sharing experiences and by examining previously published/reported information, authors have identified several less reported (not well-known) behaviours. Some of these practices are mainly influenced either by the undue institutional expectations of research esteem or by the change in the journal review process. These malpractices can loosely be divided into three different categories relating to (a) personal practises - individual/researcher linked behaviours, (b) research linked practices - methodological malpractices including data management, and (c) publication related practices - those that contravene publishing ethics. Individual or researcher linked unethical behaviours are mostly related to “committed bias”, by which author selectively uses the data to suit their own hypothesis or what they perceive as ground-breaking studies. This is often result in conducts in which research (and in some cases the data/results) were statistically manipulated to suit the perceived conclusion.

On the other hand, methodological malpractice relates to selection of out dated protocols that are not suited for the intended work. Although these can be unintentional (which would be picked by the reviewer/editor during publication process), the incidences of intentional



manipulations have been reported to authors of this study.

For example, carrying out investigations without positive (or negative) controls; but including these from previous study. Another unreported behaviour is the use of ghost negative controls (i.e. purposely omitting steps in negative controls). Other methodological malpractices such as unfair repetitions or selective inclusion of repeated data to gain statistical significance, retrospective ethical approvals etc. In addition, authors have identified several unacceptable behaviours relating to publishing ethics. The paper will elaborate these behaviours in details and propose the ways by which these can be minimised

**Keywords:** ethical code, research practices, misconduct, publications.