Author’s response to reviews

Title: The Publication of Ethically Uncertain Research: Attitudes and Practices of Journal Editors

Authors:

Carla L Angelski (angelski@ualberta.ca)
Conrad V Fernandez (conrad.fernandez@iwk.nshealth.ca)
Charles Weijer (cweijer@uwo.ca)
Jun Gao (Jun.Gao@ccns.nshealth.ca)

Version: 5 Date: 15 March 2012

Author's response to reviews: see over
March 13th, 2012

Editorial Staff
BMC Medical Ethics

Dear Editors,

Please find the following revised manuscript, entitled “The Publication of Ethically Uncertain Research: Attitudes and Practices of Journal Editors” as a submission for your consideration for publication in BMC Medical Ethics.

Regarding the 2\textsuperscript{nd} iteration of suggested revisions please consider the following:

\textbf{Reviewer 1}
1. As per previous submissions, our survey response rate remains low. It remains in keeping with average survey response rates published in the literature. We have taken steps to rectify this in the past, as is suggested in the manuscript, however at this time we will be unable to better what was attained. Respectfully we disagree that the response rate is \textit{“far too low to tell us anything meaningful about what ‘Journal editors’ (as a group) do or do not believe.”} We believe that the publication of our results represent a small but not insignificant variety of opinion and therefore provide an interesting platform to foster discussion and debate.
2. We have not attempted to draw direct comparisons between the two surveys (ours and the 1977 version). This was again noted and highlighted within the manuscript itself. We do bring the readers attention to the fact that we are surveying a different population, at a different time in scientific history. We believe that this remains important as editors-in-chief of major scientific journals likely have very valid opinions regarding how they view themselves ethically. We therefore chose to describe our findings descriptively.
3. Respectfully, we must disagree that \textit{“just because it seems impossible to obtain meaningful data…doesn’t transform inadequate data into useful information.”} We again believe that this can be likened to the over-publication bias one encounters regarding positive results in the literature. We may not have directly comparable ‘negative results’ to serve as the foundation for this argument, however, the unwillingness to answer our survey raises an interesting conundrum that deserves to be discussed. We therefore felt it was relevant to describe what data was available while highlighting the obvious limitations that a small sample size imposes.

\textbf{Reviewer #3}
1. We have highlighted percentages as suggested.

Overall, we feel that we have taken the steps necessary to ensure that appropriate revision of the attached submitted manuscript and tables have been undertaken. We believe that although there may be aspects of the survey that were less than
ideal, the questions raised by issues that were encountered are in and of themselves worthy of debate and discussion.

Thank-you for your continued consideration.

Yours Sincerely,

Carla Angelski MD, FRCPC
Stollery Children’s Hospital
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB

Email: angelski@ualberta.ca
Phone: 780.233.1199
Fax: 780.248.5625