Reviewer’s report

Title: Concern noted: A descriptive study of editorial expressions of concern in PubMed and PubMed Central.

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Reviewer: Michaela Torkar

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This is a well done and clearly presented study of the use of Expressions of Concerns in the biomedical literature with an analysis of what happens to the disputed publications.

There is a growing body of work analysing trends with respect to retractions, but the use of Expressions of Concern has not received much attention. The authors did a systematic search of PubMed, PMC and Google Scholar, as well as some publisher and journal websites, and have collected a lot of valuable data, which they are making fully available via the OSF repository. They provide very interesting insights into historical trends and identify and highlight the inconsistencies with how Expressions of Concerns are handled by different journals.

I have only few suggestions to improve clarity:

- Background: Although this is at the core of their study and made clear later in the Method section, it would be helpful if the authors could explain early how they define "issued" Expressions of Concern (i.e. that they do not restrict their analysis to formally published and indexed EEOCs).

- Method: (Additional data file 1) I couldn't see a rationale for selecting the 9 publisher websites that were included in the search, or for focusing on the 2014-2016 time frame for further analysis.

- The authors analysed the time for retractions to occur after the EEOCs were issued. Can they discuss how this delay affects the 2014-2016 sample? Are there any limitations because many retractions would not have come through for more recent EEOCs?

- Figure 3: It would be helpful to have an expanded legend here. The discussion states that 62 publications represent 82% of the 76 retracted publications shown; 2 retracted papers couldn't be analysed fully - what are the remaining 12? ("Unretracted" should be "Publication unretracted").

- Discussion: The authors stated "Although we had no language restrictions, our search strategies would not have identified an EEOC entirely in a language other than English"? I understand what they mean, but as written the statement seems to a contradiction.
- It would be interesting to have some references to the total number of retractions in the investigated time frames (e.g. how many retractions are issued without being preceded by an EEOC; what is the delay between publication and retraction when there is no EEOC).

- This is clearly beyond the scope of this study, which was motivated to focus on PubMed, but if the authors know how common EEOCs are in other disciplines and how they are handled, they might want to include a brief discussion about this.

- The Additional data files are all very clearly labelled and structured. It's not immediately obvious by looking at the sheet what the numbers for "Excluded - not EEOCs" refer to (in Additional data file 3) - are these also PubMed IDs?

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