

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The egos and the goals of reporting results

Dear Editor,

We read with great interest the editorial on 'fraud in scientific publishing', written by Scully and Baum (2006), which showed us one of the ways to prevent the publication of fraudulent research in outstanding journals. Unfortunately, it is clear that frauds will continue to occur, and journals will have to continue to find ways to avoid publishing untruthful results. It is time to take this problem even more seriously. First, its magnitude is hard to estimate. Misconduct in science is certainly not restricted to those major scandals that spread on the news. It also includes failure to explain weakness in data, selective reporting of results, failure to publish negative results, practice of irresponsible authorship and wasteful (i.e. repetitive) publication (Snyder and Loring, 2006). The intense pressure created to generate publications is probably a major contributor to fraud (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2002). Morality provides only a general guide to conduct, and not all individuals belonging to the same society agree with that particular code. But how can we protect science from those who attempt to ruin its reputation? Auditing seems to be the most obvious strategy to identify fraudulent research, while teaching and good models may be the basic pillars for primary prevention. Scientists should understand that research misconduct can have devastating consequences on the patients, the researcher himself, the colleagues and the institution where it occurred (Weed, 1998). Maybe we should start earlier, emphasizing the importance of

philosophy and ethics to school age children. It is never too late for that. We should never forget Charles Darwin's sentence – 'science consists in grouping facts so that general laws or conclusions may be drawn from them'. The future of science totally depends on how reliable scientists are.

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