Abstract 41

General Information

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Abstract Information

Abstract Title: Truth is Stranger than Fiction – A Tale of Two Papers
Abstract: **Background:** In summer 2015 two papers (A and B) appeared in two different journals. They focused on the same topic and used data from the same centre covering the same time period. The first and corresponding authors in both papers were surgical trainees. The second and senior authors in both papers were, respectively, an international authority with over thirty year’s clinical experience in this particular field with a full and comprehensive training in the specialty, and, in the second paper, a person with little clinical experience in the field who had completed no formal training program in the specialty. The conclusions from the two papers were diametrically opposite. Why is this so and what lessons can be learnt to guide future junior authors on their rights, responsibilities but also risks of authorship?
Methods: Emotional catharsis followed by reflective analysis of both visible and invisible factors. Review of COPE guidelines and feedback from the WAME members. Informal notification of concerns to authors of paper B. Formal notification of concerns to Editor of Journal publishing paper B.

Results: Emotional catharsis can be counterproductive in the pursuit of Scientific Truth. It is however a preparation for a more objective reflective analysis. The principle invisible factor was the personal animosity of the senior author of paper B towards the senior author of paper A. Visible factors are multiple but include a fundamental lack of understanding of both authors in paper B of the pathophysiology of the clinical condition. This lead to an analysis of data undertaken by a junior trainee who was equally oblivious of the erroneous premise on which the study was based.

Conclusion: The motivation for publication is not always noble. Editors must be aware of this and an appropriate response needs to be determined.