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DEFENSIBLE STATEMENTS: AN ETHICAL CONSIDERATION FOR SCHOLARLY WRITING



he peer reviewed journals endure because they publish work that is original research as well as work in the form of a literature review, a case study/series, a commentary, and so on. In this respect they are learned journals of the profession, the repositories of knowledge and scholarly papers. The process of peer review has been concisely explained by Bolton, (1) who described the role of the reviewer as that of a referee, who must “. . . check that the evidence. . .” (is) “satisfactory to justify the conclusions presented in the manuscript.” Reviewers are selected for their various skills and knowledge bases (2,3).

The benefit of scholarly journals includes their content being of such a nature as to be suitable for general public circulation (4). The structure of scholarly papers within such journals has been defined for a number of years (4,5) and includes an introduction which answers the question “what is the problem?” The knowledge that the “journal article” will, on the one hand, be repositied forever, and on the other, be available for public consumption at the time of publication, generates an opportunity for an author to express introductory statements to set the scene for identification of “the problem” being addressed.

The ethics of publication (6) are clearly described regarding authorship, data reporting; and the appropriate use of statistics; however little is recorded with respect to the ethical use of state-

ments made during the introduction to reports of original work. The Instructions to Authors include the introduction as a ‘text’ page and require one or two authoritative references to support a particular point (7). An empirical observation with respect to the material published in the indexed, peer-reviewed chiropractic literature during 1992, was the identification of what could be considered unsubstantiated statements within the introduction of original work.

This study was undertaken to investigate that the empirical observation in the knowledge that the chiropractic journal editors have recently focussed on improving the ethical use of statistical reports within papers and the suitability or otherwise of their inclusion, interpretation, and justification for use, (8) an activity which has not been without controversy (3).

Quantitative data were obtained as a measure of qualitative phenomena, namely the opinions of a sample of editors and reviewers regarding the need to reference certain statements. These have been interpreted in an attempt to identify whether or not there was any substance to the empirical observation that statements which should reasonably be referenced were being published without reference or substantiation in the learned chiropractic journals.

The intent of this paper is to report the results of this study with a view to strengthening the ethical nature of chi-

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