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Archive of Oncology makes clear that it is strictly committed to Good Scientific Practice

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In this issue of Archive of Oncology, a rare book on medical ethics containing, among other things, an enormous number of ever-changing regulations of medical practice, is reviewed (1). Both the author of the book and the reviewer had addressed a serious criticism to the actual situation in our country, accusing not only medical bureaucracy, but also the whole medical community for lethargy, at least when ethics is concerned.

In contrast to the plethora of regulations in medical profession, the science, privileged by true public confidence, is self-governed thus far. Until recently, the research ethics was an esoteric term; however, the last decade is characterized by lively debate on this topic (2). This was prompted by several serious violations of basic principles of science, i.e. scientific misconduct. It has been questioned whether science in its institutions has sufficient control mechanisms for quality assurance, and whether there is a need for new regulations to protect science against abusive research practices. Although there is no need for governmental action, it is agreed that the safeguards can and must be established. Recognizing that the research community must be able to police itself - or the confidence of the general community will be lost- several institutions of science initiated the formulation of rules of good scientific practice.

Thus, an international Commission on Professional Self-Regulation in Science was appointed. After surveying the problems in the scientific system and the institutional regulations in those countries that had experienced grave cases of scientific misconduct, the Commission published Proposals for Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice in January 1998 (3).

The Recommendations of this commission are mainly addressed to the universities and research institutes, but also to the other institutions of science - among them, also to the scientific journals. "Scientific journals shall make it clear in their guidelines for authors that they are committed to best international practice with regard to the originality of submitted papers and the criteria for authorship. Reviewers of submitted manuscripts shall be bound to respect confidentiality and to disclose conflicts of interest" (Recommendation 12).

Commentary of this recommendation includes the core of publishing - authorship, peer reviewing, confidentiality, conflict of

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interest and other questions of quality assurance. Several journal editors had already followed this recommendation, putting a separate paragraph on ethics in their Instructions for authors. I feel the Archive of Oncology should do the same.

Some important items are already included in the Instructions for Authors. These are: demand for written statements that the content of a submitted manuscript has not previously been published or submitted for publication elsewhere; demand for preparation of manuscripts in accordance to so-called Vancouver rules; demand for statement that the clinical examination was performed according to Good Clinical Practice; demand for acknowledgement of financial support; demand for a statement that the manuscript has been read and approved by all authors; demand for statement of financial or other relationships that might lead to a conflict of interest. The Editorial board of Archives of Oncology would improve the editorial policy by the addition of several points: publishing the introductory statement that the journal strictly adheres to the principles of Good Scientific Practice; publishing *in extenso* the latest, improved versions of Vancouver rules; to have guidelines for reviewers of manuscripts committing them to strict confidentiality and to disclosing any conflict of interests, and also obliging them to review within short time limits; to appoint a person (ombudsman) to deal with editorial maladministration (4).

Some efforts have already been made: a new organization in Europe currently looking for ways to beef up mechanisms to deal with publication misconduct - Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) - was set up by the editors of nine prominent medical journals. This committee can work across the whole spectrum of publishing misconduct, but it is felt that, eventually, an independent body to investigate claims should be appointed (5). Such a body might be a new institution within scientific community - the institution of Ombudsman. In next issue of Archive of Oncology we shall discuss whether or not our journal needs such an institution.

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