

## Head and Neck Oncology - the sixth year (part1): Editorial.

W Jerjes<sup>1\*</sup>, C Hopper<sup>2</sup>

Dear Colleagues

In July 2012, BioMed Central made several serious accusations against the Editors-in-Chief of Head & Neck Oncology (especially those based in the UK, Colin Hopper, Waseem Jerjes and Tahwinder Upile) including accusations of editorial mishandling and research misconduct (plagiarism, failure to declare conflicts of interests, duplicate publication and citation manipulation). The Editors-in-Chief were given 24 hours to respond to all accusations. At the same time, BioMed Central blocked access to all editorial tools, denying the Editors-in-Chief any access to the raw data. BioMed Central also failed to involve any independent party in their investigation despite the fact that the UK-based Editors-in-Chief are doctors registered with the General Medical Council and these allegations (if proven to be correct) could severely prejudice their clinical and academic careers.

BioMed Central decided to cease publishing the Journal and sent numerous emails to editorial board members and authors of the Journal informing them that the Journal was closed due to ethical issues. At the same time, BioMed Central posted a false statement concerning the Journal on its website. BioMed Central also sent emails to authors of pending articles advising them to withdraw their articles from Head & Neck Oncology and to submit them to a rival BioMed Central journal.

Although BioMed Central's actions have been damaging to the reputations of the Editors-in-Chief, we have approached the problem sensibly and explained to editorial board members and authors that there is no basis for any of these accusations. We are pleased to confirm that the Journal has retained its world class editorial board with no change.

Title to the Journal passed to the Editors-in-Chief upon BioMed Central's decision to cease publication. The Editors-in-Chief then decided to re-launch the Journal with another publisher.

BioMed Central commenced a further investigation against the authors and editors of the Journal stating that if BioMed Central received no satisfactory response to their enquiries (including copies of patients' consent forms and ethical approvals) then BioMed Central would retract several articles from the Journal (which by that time belonged to a different publisher) without the consent of the Editors-in-Chief. This gave rise to serious concerns among many authors (clinicians and scientists) in the head and neck discipline. We continued to support our authors during this difficult time and succeeded in preserving the content of Head and Neck Oncology with no record of any retraction.

BioMed Central reported the three UK-based Editors-in-Chief to University College London. Although UCL had jurisdiction under its Procedure to investigate all three UK-based Editors-in-Chief, they chose not to investigate Tahwinder Upile (a former student and member of staff) and Waseem Jerjes (a doctoral student and former member of staff).

Subsequently, the UCL investigation (which was conducted jointly with UCLH) found no case to answer against Mr Hopper and any employee, researcher or student and cleared all the articles that were the subject of BioMed Central's complaint. UCL's findings cleared the Journal and its Editors-in-Chief from any editorial or research misconduct.

Despite UCL's findings, BioMed Central continue to publish false and damaging statements concerning the Journal and the Editors-in-Chief. Recently, BioMed Central published a comment regarding Head & Neck Oncology and its Editors-in-Chief on one of its journal's websites (BMC Medicine). This false and damaging statement cited publisher's notes on a number of Head & Neck Oncology articles (on the inactive/archived website of the Journal hosted by BioMed Central) which were calculated to give the impression that there had been editorial mishandling. We would like to assure our authors that these notes are not recognised by the current owner of the Journal and the Journal's Editors-in-Chief and we will continue to provide support to our authors. A separate statement will be released regarding these false and damaging notes published by BioMed Central.

As a consequence of BioMed Central's actions, reviving the Journal again is not an easy task. The National Library of Medicine has requested written confirmation from BioMed Central that it no longer has title to the Journal and a letter confirming the outcome of the investigation. Although the Journal is now the property of another publisher and despite the satisfactory outcome of UCL's investigation, BioMed Central refuses to provide the confirmations sought.

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Despite BioMed Central's conduct since July 2012, we are determined to restore the Journal to its prestigious status.

We aim to start a petition to the National Library of Medicine (PubMed) and hope that our friends and colleagues will support us in this endeavour. We hope to convince our colleagues in the NLM that the false accusations made by BioMed Central against the Editors-in-Chief have no basis as University College London has already found. A similar petition will be sent to Thompson Reuters to deal with the impact factor issue.

We thank you for your continued support.

### *Conflict of interests and Competing interests*

#### **W Jerjes declaration**

I am Co-Editor-in-Chief of Head and Neck Oncology and have been since the day of its foundation. I am a Co-Founder and Council Member of the Head and Neck Optical Diagnostics and Intervention Society (a UCLH-based charity). I am Vice-Chairman of the Publication Integrity and Ethics and Director of this not-for-profit organization.

I have 2 relatives practicing within the fields of online publishing, training and education.

#### **C Hopper declaration**

I am Co-Editor-in-Chief of Head and Neck Oncology and have been since the day of its foundation. I am a Co-Founder and Council Member of the Head and Neck Optical Diagnostics and Intervention Society (a UCLH-based charity). I am the Chairman of the Publication Integrity and Ethics.

*Competing interests: declared in the article. Conflict of interests: declared in the article.  
All authors contributed to conception and design, manuscript preparation, read and approved the final manuscript.  
All authors abide by the Association for Medical Ethics (AME) ethical rules of disclosure.*