Passion, publication, promotion and payment: which "Ps" drive scientists?

Paixão, publicação, promoção e pagamento: quais "Ps" motivam os cientistas?

Wallace Chamon

Scientists have different reasons to submit a work for publication. Ideally every publication should be the final consequence of curiosity: a question posed after an observation that could not be satisfactorily answered by the researcher. To teach scientific drive is to teach questioning, once the correct question is presented to a scientifically driven mind, the natural consequence is a research project that should be eventually published. Then, science may become a profession and publication becomes indispensable for promotion and better funding that keeps the active researcher. Payment may also drive scientists for publication in unquestionable examples of misconduct, but one should consider that other social factors might be equivalently important in scientific misconduct. Direct personal payment may not be as important as keeping the job of a public-sponsored scientist. As a matter of fact, most of the reported scientific frauds are related to personal than financial interests[1]. The axiom "Publish or perish" abbreviates the cycle: "Research Work, Publication, Research Funding", which is essential for the survival of the academic research.

Editors and reviewers are not aware of the reasons that lead the researchers to publish their work; therefore they evaluate the manuscripts based only on the importance and quality of the results. Ultimately the quality of a paper can be measured by how many times this paper has been cited in the scientific literature. The future citation indexes of a manuscript will be its measure of relevance and will tell if editors and reviewers were successful in evaluating it. Sometimes, medical scientists face a conflict between being the only ones to provide certain clinical or surgical treatment and sharing openly his or her findings, allowing the knowledge to be disseminated. There should be no conflict: to publish is to share.

Retraction is a mechanism that authors and editors use to communicate that a specific publication should not be considered reliable. Basically, a work can be retracted if it has been considered to based on serious errors, plagiarism or fraud, being the two last ones named scientific misconduct[2]. An editor is forced to consider a retraction whenever it comes to his or her attention any concern related to the work. The authors themselves or any reader can trigger it. When a manuscript is retracted it is not removed from the scientific databases, but it will always be flagged as being unreliable. Mistakes happen, misconduct should not. "Plagiarism is the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit, including those obtained through confidential review of others' research proposals and manuscripts.", Office of Science and Technology Policy,1999)[3]. Self-plagiarism is to use same data in different publications of the same author in order to increase his or her number of publications.

The demand for scientific efficiency may be related to the recently growing of retracted papers, mostly due to misconduct[4-7]. A global effort to expose and control misconduct has shown that the concern is present throughout the world[8-15]. Amid the 2,576 retracted publications on PubMed to date, ophthalmology counts for 14, being the first one reported in 1993 [PubMed Search: (retracted publication) AND ophthalmology]. This has led some ophthalmological publications to express their concerns about fraud and plagiarism[1,14,16]. Recently, the scientific community was exposed by a tentatively anonymous scientist that faced the fear of their own colleagues when trying to publicize scientific fraud on internet[17].

Science will continue to steer humankind knowledge, therefore society needs Scientists that vow to choose the correct "P" and keep alive the original, almost infantile, Passion for curiosity.

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[1] Physician, Department of Ophthalmology, Escola Paulista de Medicina - EPM, Universidade Federal de São Paulo - UNIFESP - São Paulo (SP), Brazil.

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