

◆ EDITORIAL VIEWS

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Plagiarism

In the August issue of ANESTHESIOLOGY, an invited editorial by Drs. Anish Bhardwaj and Jeffrey Kirsch from Johns Hopkins University was published. Within several days, I received a letter from Dr. James Cottrell, stating that he believed a substantial portion of that editorial had been copied from his 1997 ASA Refresher Course lecture. Dr. Cottrell also notified the senior author of his concerns (Dr. Kirsch), who passed the letter to the administration of Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions. An immediate investigation by the Medicine Standing Committee on Discipline confirmed Dr. Cottrell's concerns, agreeing that as much as 40% of the editorial had been copied from his previous publication without attribution. Primary responsibility for the event was accepted by the junior author (Dr. Bhardwaj). Nevertheless, the committee believed that a written apology from both authors was required. Given the gravity of the situation, I believed that these letters should be published in the editorial pages of the Journal.

Although such cases of blatant plagiarism have been discovered during the review process (and resulted in the immediate rejection of the article, combined with notification of the responsible departmental executives), this is, to the best of my knowledge, the first incidence in which an article containing such material has appeared in print in ANESTHESIOLOGY. Every editor lives in fear of such an event; plagiarism is extremely difficult to detect and yet at the same time is intensely embarrassing to the Journal. No editor can know the detailed content of all the published literature; all cases with which I am familiar were discovered not by the editors, but rather by the authors of the plagiarized material (who in many cases have the good fortune to serve as reviewers). In fact, as occurred in the current case, one author may not be aware of plagiarism committed by a fellow author. In fact, it is extremely difficult for one author to defend him- or herself against such actions committed by others.

In many cases, it is tempting to excuse plagiarism as an innocent mistake. In some cases, this may be true, particularly when the copied material consists of an isolated sentence or two. However, when it involves large blocks of material, it is difficult to ascribe the event to an "accident" or a simple oversight. The contention that

"the other writer simply expressed the idea so well that I thought the comments could not be improved upon" is totally unacceptable. Why does this represent such a serious transgression? A person's published words are the product of a great deal of training, thought, and effort. To represent another's thoughts as one's own is at best misrepresentation. To quote from a letter from Dr. Cottrell, "Plagiarism is a substitute for writing, and so a substitute for thinking." At worst, it is theft of intellectual property, and therefore represents a serious challenge to the integrity of any publishing effort.

On behalf of the Journal, I would like to apologize to our readers for this event. The Journal also would like to formally withdraw the originally published editorial. The letters from the authors follow.

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To the Editor:—This is a letter regarding the Editorial Views in ANESTHESIOLOGY 1998; 89:289-91 entitled "Anesthetic agents and hypothermia in ischemic neuroprotection."

Dr. James Cottrell called to our attention the fact that substantial sections (about 40%) appear almost verbatim from his article in the American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) course book entitled *Brain Protection in Neurosurgery*. He is correct. During the preparation of this editorial view, it is clear that I lost sight of the original source (Dr. Cottrell's article) of some of the ideas and text and failed to reference the article as an important source of these ideas. Omitting Dr. Cottrell's article as a reference was a grievous error, but this was not done with any malicious intent or with goals of self promotion. This serious mistake was committed out of a combination of carelessness, haste and inexperience.

My coauthor, Dr. Jeffrey R. Kirsch, had absolutely no knowledge of my methodology in preparing this article. Dr. Kirsch has been an excellent mentor and role model for me over the past several years and I have nothing but admiration for his work ethic and integrity. I understand that the unattributed use of another's work is not con-

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