

EDITORIAL VIEWS

Anesthesiology
1998; 89:1307-8
© 1998 American Society of Anesthesiologists, Inc.
Lippincott Williams & Wilkins

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.

Michael M. Todd, M.D.
Editor-in-Chief, ANESTHESIOLOGY
Department of Anesthesia
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa
anesthesiology@uiowa.edu

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-

Accepted for publication October 26, 1998.

Key word: Plagiarism.

EDITORIAL VIEWS

sistent with the forthright pursuit of scientific truth in an honest and collegial manner. This is a mistake I could not regret more. I would like to express my deepest regret to Dr. James Cottrell and the readers of ANESTHESIOLOGY. I also deeply regret the anguish and pain I have caused my other mentors and collaborators at the Johns Hopkins Hospital.

I request that this editorial be formally retracted from ANESTHESIOLOGY.

Anish Bhardwaj, M.D.

Assistant Professor of Neurology,
Johns Hopkins Medicine
600 North Wolfe Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21287

To the Editor:—Recently I reviewed a manuscript for ANESTHESIOLOGY entitled "Differential Effects of Anesthetic Agents on Outcome from Near-complete but not Incomplete Global Ischemia in the Rat." Subsequent to my review the manuscript was accepted for publication, and I was asked to write an editorial. The editorial view that bears my name is entitled "Anesthetic Agents and Hypothermia in Ischemic Brain Protection." I recruited Dr. Anish Bhardwaj to assist me with this editorial. I have had the pleasure of working with Dr. Bhardwaj, a junior investigator in our laboratories, for the past three years. We have several joint publications and I have never had the occasion to question his skills or integrity as a high quality investigator. On the contrary, I have found Dr. Bhardwaj to be an extraordinarily hard-working and thoughtful investigator.

In preparation for writing this editorial, I reviewed the original and revised manuscript with Dr. Bhardwaj. I also provided him with a copy of my original critique and we discussed the direction that the editorial should pursue. Several days later Dr. Bhardwaj provided me with a first draft of the editorial. I reviewed it carefully and provided suggestions for improvement. The final version was submitted to the ANESTHESIOLOGY Editorial Office several days later.

Following publication of the editorial I was informed that components of this editorial appeared to be taken directly from Dr. James E. Cottrell's 1997 Refresher Course Lecture "Brain Protection In Neurosurgery." I had not previously read this article which was written by Dr. Cottrell, nor did I attend the lecture that was provided by Dr. Cottrell on this topic at the 1997 ASA Refresher Course series in San Diego, California.

This incident has been formally reviewed by The Johns Hopkins School of Medicine Standing Committee on Discipline. After complete review of all the facts, the Committee has accepted Dr. Bhardwaj's statement, which appears in the accompanying letter.

I apologize to the Editorial Staff, the readers of ANESTHESIOLOGY, Lippinott Williams & Wilkins, Miura *et al.*, and Dr. James E. Cottrell for the entire event. I request that the editorial be formally retracted by ANESTHESIOLOGY.

Jeffrey R. Kirsch, M.D.

Associate Professor
Anesthesiology and Critical Care Medicine
Johns Hopkins Medicine
600 North Wolfe Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21287