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# MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

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## The ethics of research and publishing

In these competitive times it has become very important that one's curriculum vitae is impressive. The adage 'Publish or Perish' has virtually become the 11<sup>th</sup> commandment in academia. This drive to publish and be recognised does not come without its dangers though. The constant drive to come out on top leads to abuses and tactics which can cloud researchers' and authors' judgements and morals.

All research needs to be ethical and responsible. Recognising this, journals of repute now insist on appropriate ethics committee clearance before publishing papers. This not only safeguards both authors and publishers, but more importantly protects the rights of our patients. Our field of research is essentially clinical and patient-driven. Our patients' treatment outcomes cannot be compromised because we think a research project may be a 'good idea'. To this end regulations are in place to ensure strict adherence to basic human rights.

Ethical research also demands strict compliance with the principles of good clinical practice. This ensures reliability of methodology, and robust data from which to draw conclusions. Good Clinical Practice (GCP) courses should be a prerequisite for anyone embarking on a research project. While it is human nature to dwell on positive outcomes, it is our duty as investigators to report poor outcomes with equal vigour and persistence. It is just as important to understand which procedures do not work, and which prostheses fail. To this end complete honesty is paramount and personal agendas are dangerous. In light of this a full declaration of investigators' commercial links and affiliations has become the norm. The importance of 'a commercial interest clouds one's clinical judgement' needs to be remembered and strict adherence to good clinical practice, sound research principles, watertight ethical standards, and a completely open and truthful conflict of interests statement will ensure world standard research and papers.

It goes without saying that work reported either in oral presentations or papers is original. When the intention is to confirm other authors' findings, due reference and credit must of course be made to the original investigations. Unfortunately academic dishonesty happens with monotonous regularity. Plagiarism is tantamount to intellectual theft and academic fraud and cannot be condemned strongly enough. Fortunately electronic tools are now available to detect this and expose the culprits.

Multiple authorships are important in recognising contributions to articles. It is accepted that various levels of contribution entitles co-authorship. This includes conceptualisation of the investigation, actual execution of the work, collection and interpretation of data, and finally the actual writing of the manuscript. All authors should be able to present the work to a learned gathering, and to defend the interpretation of the results. The contribution of cases to a study, and seniority in a department or institution, does not automatically entitle one to co-authorship. We cannot allow the devaluation of good research and articles because of the egos of ambitious CVs.

It gives me great pleasure that our Journal is moving with the times. We are making a declaration of conflict of interests statement obligatory in respect of each author of published articles. An ethics committee clearance will be required for all relevant patient-based research. We will also be pursuing plagiarism with vigour, and are determined to stamp it out. Finally, all members of the editorial board will be expected to sign a statement of interests. These moves by our Journal and the South African Orthopaedic Association will go a long way to further enhance the stature of the *South African Orthopaedic Journal*.

**Dick van der Jagt**  
**President: South African Orthopaedic Association**

