

SKOPJE DECLARATION ON SCIENTIFIC AND PUBLISHING INTEGRITY IN BIOMEDICINE

We, the participants of the scientific conference with international participation “Scientific and publishing integrity in biomedicine”, Skopje, MASA, 25.04.2024, organized by the Macedonian Association of Medical Editors (MAME), the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts (MASA), the University “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” (UC&M) in Skopje and the Faculty of Medicine of UC&M in Skopje, exchanged knowledge, information and experiences and developed attitudes and principles with which we made our own contribution to raising awareness of the importance of a research and publication culture with an ethical way of thinking and responsibility for the preservation and promotion of scientific and publishing integrity in biomedicine in the Republic of North (RN) Macedonia, the Southeast Europe (SEE) region and beyond.

We believe that the future of science and publishing lies in the harmonization and improvement of standards for the conduct of scientific research and scientific communication, in the respect and promotion of ethical and deontological principles that inspire and guarantee rigorous and responsible practices in research and the search for knowledge obtained through systematic study, reflection, observation and experimentation, as well as in the publication of the results obtained.

Furthermore, we believe that the integrity of the application of science and scientific communication is essential for maintaining the reliability of the research system and its outputs and for the advancement of human knowledge in the interest of humanity, for the preservation and promotion of health, the prevention and treatment of diseases and the effective solution of health problems, as well as for the protection of the environment and respect for human rights.

We believe that the international scientific community has the wisdom to update and develop a code of conduct as a framework for self-regulation with new standards to fulfil academic freedom and scientific responsibility and to provide additional tools for the prevention, detection and sanctioning of serious violations of good scientific practice and misconduct in research and publishing (falsification, fabrication and plagiarism, pathology of authorship, predatory publishing and other unacceptable practices).

As healthcare professionals and fellow researchers, and as editors/members of editorial boards of peer-reviewed scientific journals, **we adhere to all relevant codes of professional ethics** derived from the value system of medicine and allied sciences. In our quest for a better world, we have a duty to spread our understanding of ethical values in science and publishing and to promote their widespread adoption and implementation.

We support the appropriate and effective elimination of any serious threats to integrity in science and publishing and promote ethical approaches and practices through the education of healthcare professionals and collaborators, especially young researchers, and through the investigation of violations of accepted standards and norms of ethical behavior.

We are convinced that integrity in science and publishing plays an important societal role in the rigorous and ethical conduct of scientific research, appropriate scientific communication and the responsible use of scientific knowledge as a public good, and that scientists must be trained to communicate their work and research findings to decision-makers and the public.

As a result of the previous activities and achievements in RN Macedonia and other countries of the SEE region and the serious reflections of the members of MAME over the last 10 years after the establishment of MAME and the participants of the scientific conference with international participation held in Skopje on April 25, 2024, we express **our determination to act** to integrate scientific and publishing integrity issues into practice at all levels. In doing so, we emphasize the following principles and resolutions:

Principles on which good research and publishing practice is based:

- **Confidence** in the quality of research as reflected in its design, methodology, analysis and use of resources.
- **Honesty** in developing, conducting, reviewing, reporting and communicating research findings in a transparent, fair, complete and unbiased manner.
- **Respect for colleagues**, research participants, research subjects, ecosystems, cultural heritage and the environment.
- **Responsibility for research** from conception to publication of results, for its management and organization, for training, monitoring and mentoring, and for its impact on society.

Resolutions:

We are firmly committed to collaborating with research institutions and organizations, journal publishers and editors to help create a culture of integrity in research and publishing and to build an ethical environment and good practice for research and publishing, whether it appears in a subscription journal, an open access journal or any other form of publication, including preprint servers.

We are committed to act and provide leadership in developing clear policies and procedures for good research and publishing practice, research and analysis, and for dealing transparently and fairly with suspected misconduct and violations of research and publication integrity.

We are also committed to support the development of new programs and forms of training in scientific and publishing ethics and integrity, to present research findings in an open, honest, transparent and accurate manner and to respect the confidentiality of data or results when required by law, and to report on the results and methods achieved, including the use of external services or artificial intelligence and automated tools.

We support and promote the approach, principles and practice of **open science** to improve the quality of scientific research and to make the resulting outputs (including publications, data and software) widely available and usable in the scientific and academic community and beyond, in order to find their application value and utility in all fields and at all levels of society and the public.

We pledge our support for additional training of healthcare professionals, especially young scientists, in the methodology of scientific research, the principles of scientific communication and the writing of a scientific paper for possible publication in a peer-reviewed journal, as well as for training in ethics and integrity of research and publication and familiarity with international standards and relevant codes, guidelines, regulations and laws. Scientific editors should follow the latest recommendations of global editorial associations and include appropriate sections in their journal's policies to improve the quality of pre- and post-publication communication.

We reject and oppose with one voice any misconduct and violation of the integrity of research and publication (fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, etc.) that threatens good research and publication practice and harms research processes, damages relationships between researchers, reviewers and editors, undermines the trust and credibility of research and publication, wastes resources and exposes research participants and subjects, users, society or the environment to unnecessary harm.

We are determined, ready and willing to work with policy makers, relevant institutions and the international scientific community in prevention, through training, supervision and mentoring and by developing a positive and supportive research environment, and in the fight against predatory publishers and journals that undermine the peer review process and the validity of research findings by including false data and misleading information in the publications they produce without an adequate peer review process.

We are committed to support a consistent and transparent approach to violations of good research practice and allegations of research and publication misconduct, which is primarily the responsibility of the research institutions, which must provide adequate resources (time and personnel) for such investigations. Investigation to conclusion should be fair, comprehensive and expeditious, and anyone accused of research and publication misconduct is presumed innocent until proven guilty. At the same time, investigations will be conducted confidentially to protect those involved and the rights of honest whistleblowers. The action taken against those suspected of misconduct should be proportionate to the seriousness of the misconduct, and erroneous publications require corrections or retractions, as well as appropriate restorative measures when researchers are exonerated of misconduct.

To this end, we emphasize before the scientific community and all relevant stakeholders in RN Macedonia and beyond the Statement on Scientific and Publishing Integrity in Biomedicine as a step that can contribute to the creation and improvement of an ethical environment in research and publishing.

Conclusion:

The Skopje Declaration reflects the social awareness of the members of MAME and the participants of the anniversary conference on the importance of integrity in science and publishing. It is in line with the mission and value systems of the European Parliament and the European Commission as well as the leading international organizations committed to scientific and publishing integrity, such as ICMJE, COPE, CSE, ALLEA, AAAS, etc. The declaration reflects the commitment of the members of MAME and the participants of the conference in Skopje to improve the situation and progress of scientific and publishing integrity and to raise the standards of editing and publishing of scientific journals in RN Macedonia, South East Europe (SEE) and beyond.

We call on relevant institutions and organizations as well as decision-makers in the academic and scientific community, publishers and editors-in-chief, as well as editorial board members and other relevant stakeholders to accept, support and adopt our statement and contribute through appropriate policies, processes, resources and infrastructures to facilitate good research practices and the publication of research results as a practical force to promote scientific and publishing integrity.

Together we can help create a better ethical scientific and publishing environment.

Drafting Committee

The declaration was drafted by members of the MAME Board in consultation with the invited speakers and organizers of the conference and the other members of MAME.

For the participants of the scientific conference with international participation: “Scientific and publishing integrity in biomedicine”, MASA Skopje, April 25, 2024:

Prof. Dijana Plasheska Karanfilaska, President of MAME

Prof. Valentin Mircheski, President Elect of MAME

Prof. Doncho Donev, Vice President of MAME

Prof. Gordana Ristoska, Vice President of MAME

Prof. Nevzat Elezi, Vice President of MAME

Prof. Vladimir Trajkovski, Secretary General of MAME

Prim. Ilija Gligorov, Organizing Secretary of MAME

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