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CHIRURGIE
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Letters to the editor

New editor – New enforcement of ethical standards?



Nouveau rédacteur en chef – Renforcement des standards éthiques ?

Dear Sir,

Congratulations on your election to the position of editor-in-chief and on your aspirations to improve the quality of this journal. I believe that not only must all journals strive to improve the quality of their science, but also they must strive to improve the quality of the ethics [1].

I noted that the *recommandations aux auteurs* clearly state: “Les travaux soumis sont conformes aux recommandations éthiques de la déclaration d’Helsinki et doivent avoir été soumis, s’ils le requièrent, soit à un comité consultatif de protection des personnes dans la recherche biomédicale (CCPPRB), soit à un comité d’éthique. Quand un travail a été soumis à l’une de ces institutions, il doit en être fait mention dans le texte”.

The article: “Prospective continuous study comparing intrafocal cross-pinning HK2[®] with a locking plate in distal radius fracture fixation” in the February 2013 issue clearly explains a number of its methodological weaknesses such as its lack of randomization, but it makes no mention of its ethical weaknesses [2]. The article does not state that the patients included in the prospective study had given informed consent, that an independent ethics committee approved this prospective study and that the prospective study was registered in a publicly accessible database before the first patient was enrolled. These statements are required under paragraphs 24, 15 and 19, respectively, of the Declaration of Helsinki [3].

This study commenced in January 2011, but the Declaration of Helsinki’s ethical requirements were known to the corresponding author beforehand. On October 26, 2009, the corresponding author registered a clinical trial for treating fingertip injuries as NCT01002638 at clinicaltrials.gov with himself listed as the principal investigator [4].

It is too late to correct what has happened in the past, but going forward, I believe that *Chirurgie de la Main* should enforce the ethical standards that it claims to support and which other international hand journals including *Journal of Hand Surgery (American)*, *Journal of Hand Surgery (European)* and *HAND* demand.

Disclosure of interest

The author belongs to the editorial boards of *Journal of Hand Surgery (European)* and *HAND*.

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References

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- [2] Maire N, Lebailly F, Zemirline A, Hariri A, Facca S, Liverneaux P. Prospective continuous study comparing intrafocal cross-pinning HK2[®] with a locking plate in distal radius fracture fixation. *Chir Main* 2013; 32:17–24.
- [3] <http://www.wma.net/en/30publications/10policies/b3/>. [accessed February 16, 2013].
- [4] <http://clinicaltrials.gov/show/NCT01002638>. [accessed February 16, 2013].

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Answer to Dr Freshwater’s letter to editor[☆]



Réponse à la lettre à la rédaction du Dr Freshwater

I thank Dr Freshwater for his congratulations for my election. I also thank him for raising my attention onto the important point of ethics. I am considering it as important as the quality of the scientific content of the journal and I will pay attention about it for each manuscript I will receive in the next five years of my charge.

Dr Freshwater have given some unpleasant comments about a paper by one of our best teams in hand surgery in France, the team managed by Philippe Liverneaux in Strasbourg, and one of the most scientifically productive, publishing in our journal as well as other international hand surgery journals with editing committee. Their manuscript was one of the last handled by

DOI of original article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.main.2013.05.006>.

Thierry Dubert, the former editor-in-chief. I felt useful and correct letting them answer to this letter to editor, and I thank them for their here-above contributions, which are copied in extenso.

1. Philippe Liverneaux, M.D., Ph.D

“Dr Freshwater wish to improve Medical Ethics is worthy. Nevertheless, his comments to our paper do NOT fit to that goal”.

Dr Freshwater complains that our article “does not state that the patients included in the prospective study had given informed consent, that an independent ethics committee approved this prospective study and that the prospective study was registered in a publicly accessible database before the first patient was enrolled. These statements are required under paragraphs 24, 15 and 19, respectively, of the Declaration of Helsinki”. Our study did not need any ethics committee approval. This was not a prospective randomized study. Patients received standard care and were not subjected to any experimental protocol. There was no control or experimental group to warrant any Helsinki doctrine. We reported our experience with one standard well-accepted familiar method that we used for years and then we shifted to another well-accepted standard method and then compared our results. This is an outcome review.

Dr Freshwater adds that “This study commenced in January 2011, but the Declaration of Helsinki’s ethical requirements were known to the corresponding author beforehand. On October 26, 2009, the corresponding author registered a clinical trial for treating fingertip injuries as NCT01002638 at clinicaltrials.gov with himself listed as the principal investigator”. The fact that I declared another study clearly demonstrates that I am respectful of Helsinki doctrine. I did not declare the present study because it does not go into the rules of Helsinki doctrine.

Is it ethical to tarnish the reputation of an honest surgeon on a public international forum?

Competing Interests: Philippe Liverneaux is reviewer for *Archives of Plastic Surgery*, *Chirurgie de la Main* (former deputy editor), clinical anatomy, *European Journal of Orthopaedic Surgery and Traumatology* (former deputy editor), *Journal of Hand and Microsurgery*, *Journal of Hand Surgery–European volume–* (former member to the editorial board), *Journal of Orthopaedic Science* (member to the editorial board), *Journal of Wrist Surgery* (Deputy Editor), *Orthopaedics & Traumatology: Surgery & Research*, *Surgical and Radiologic Anatomy*”.

2. Thierry Dubert, M.D.

“This letter raises an ethical issue that cannot be ignored”.

However, in its present state, the conclusions of the author are not supported by the content of the article.

The arguments are based on a single article in “*Chirurgie de la main*”, from which the author concludes that the French journal should rise to the standard of the American and European journals.

The only reference given by the author is his own article where he reports that less than 1% of the 155 plastic surgery

articles respect the DOH guidelines. This conclusion should appear in the letter even though it works against his conclusion.

Moreover, the percentage of articles from other hand surgery journals that actually respect the DOH guidelines must be stated, otherwise the conclusion is unsupported.

Finally, Dr Freshwater must explain the difficulty in respecting these DOH guidelines in clinical research, especially in surgery and especially in Europe.

Unfortunately, without these modifications, I am hardly inclined to favour the publication of this letter that can do little for the evolution of editorial procedures”.

3. Christian Fontaine, M.D., Ph.D.

I thank Thierry Dubert for underlining the weaknesses of Dr Freshwater’s criticism, and Philippe Liverneaux for reestablishing the truth about the bases of his study and defending the honor of him and coauthors.

I finally would like to thank Dr Freshwater for drawing my attention about the problem of ethics in research and publishing research results, even the case chosen to do seems not being the right one.

To help everyone who wants to enter in research in the clinical field of hand and upper limb, I am a proud to publish here-after the last version of Declaration of Helsinki.

I would be pleased to receive in a next future an article from Dr Freshwater about his research and probably publish it in this journal I am responsible for, after the usual reviewing process of course.

Whatever the content of any answer that I could receive about this letter to editor and the answer that P. Liverneaux, T. Dubert and I have written, I will not publish it; I consider that the debate is closed. If one of the protagonists wants to go on, he should write directly to his main correspondent: this journal does not work as a permanently open column for long lasting debates.

Competing Interests: Christian Fontaine is also associate-editor for *Surgical and Radiologic Anatomy* (hand and wrist), reviewer for *Anatomical Records*, *Anatomy and Cell Biology*, *Anatomy Research International*, *Annals of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine*, *Chirurgie de la Main*, *Clinical Anatomy*, *Clinical Biomechanics*, *European Journal of Anatomy*, *Journal of Shoulder and Elbow Surgery*, *Journal of Neurology*, *Neurosurgery & Psychiatry*, *Morphologie*, *Muscle & Nerve*, *Orthopedic Surgery and Traumatology Surgery*, *Surgical and Radiologic Anatomy*, *Turkish Journal of Clinical Anatomy*.

Disclosure of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest concerning this article.

Appendix 1. Déclaration d’Helsinki.

Adoptée par la 18^e Assemblée générale de l’AMM, Helsinki, Finlande, juin 1964 et amendée par les

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