

# Analysis of a Recent Statement on Medical Publishing Issues as Identified by an Ottawa Symposium

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## Opinion

Scholars who recently gathered in Ottawa to discuss expanding ethical issues in scientific literature have brought new focus to bear on this enduring, and possibly endearing, question. (<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-03759-y>) In response, we convened a group (N=2) at the International House of Policy to consider how this set of definitions reflects our own experience. The resulting IHOP Statement is finally being formally formulated, but first formative findings are as follows. The undersigned claim particular knowledge of such slime-drenched journalistic practices through our experience in practicing them ourselves. In short, this is our back yard and therefore there can be no better venue for a response. We address the five definitions in the same sequence in which they appear in Nature.

### Putting profit over scholarship

Clearly this is an attractive concept, but we believe that ultimately it can prove misleading, based on our intimate experience, implying as it does that scholarship is in some form a thing to be found in our operations in the first place. Item A cannot be said take precedence over Item B if the latter (B) is not at the table.

### Having false or misleading information

Again, this misses the mark, raising the philosophical conundrum of how one may be said to distribute false information if in fact all information is absent. This is not mere sophistry. It is a fine yet important distinction. As a second point, many journals ensure the accuracy of their information by lifting it wholesale from prior publications, preserving the precise content and hence the correct meaning. This practice is known by some in the journalism world as scalping, though doubtless there are other, grittier terms.

### Deviating from best practices

We take the philosophical analogy of travelling down a road. None of us who gathered at the International House of Policy, as it happens, has ever been to the American town of Lordsburg, NM, and therefore we cannot be said to deviate from the main street of Lordsburg. One can deviate only from a course that one has taken in the past. (One refers to the work of the late John Ford, in 1939, as the pre-eminent study of roads and modes of transportation in Lordsburg.) Similarly, one cannot be said to deviate from a set of best practices to which one emphatically has not adhered in the first place. Any judge would make such a charge of deviance vanish faster than an IHOP original buttermilk full stack on seniors' Tuesday.

### Lacking transparency

This is a more serious charge, as it unfortunately contains some uncomfortable historical truths that we cannot ignore. Our group has at times failed to provide full and frank information on the nature of our shortcomings. We are working on principles of fuller transparency but cannot reveal them as they are confidential.

### Using indiscriminate or aggressive solicitation

This is entirely correct. Discrimination has no place in modern society, whether based on

nationality, religion, colour or other prejudices. We are therefore proud to be indiscriminate and regard this as a core value to be emulated by all and sundry, especially sundry.

### Conclusion

we at IHOP compliment the Ottawa group on its insights, its collegiality, and its wisdom in avoiding the LRT. We look forward to refining our own policy document over the coming months.

The authors declare they have no financial interests in this matter. We also offer our clients quick peer review.

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