



Science and Technology Committee

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From Rt Hon Norman Lamb MP, Chair

Richard Horton
Editor
The Lancet
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15th January 2019

Dear Richard Horton,

Processes and timescales for retracting fraudulent research

As Chairs of the Science and Technology and Health and Social Care Committees, we have received a letter from Peter Wilmshurst (see enclosed) regarding two papers published in The Lancet which he believes are the product of fraudulent research. His letter sets out his concerns that these papers have not been retracted—specifically Lancet 2008;372:2023–30 and Lancet 2014;383:238–44.

The papers relate to research conducted by Paulo Macchiarini and colleagues, investigations of which led to retractions of several other papers last year at the request of the Karolinska Institute, including two published by The Lancet.

Peter Wilmshurst's concern is that The Lancet has not followed up on those retractions by investigating and retracting the two related papers referenced, and that a failure to do this represents a significant risk to human health. This strikes us as a legitimate concern, based on the information he has provided.

As you may be aware, Macchiarini's work in this area and the processes for responding to findings of research misconduct was raised with the Science and Technology Committee during its inquiry into research integrity last year. The Committee also explored the extent to which publishers, funders and employers needed to work together to ensure that problems are suitably investigated and that retractions are made in a timely fashion where the research record needs to be corrected.

We would be grateful if you could set out your view on this matter, including what action The Lancet has taken so far and whether any further action in relation to the two papers referenced above will take place.

We would be interested to understand whether this example sheds any further light on how the system for considering possible article retractions should be improved to ensure that responses are timely and appropriate.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Norman Lamb MP
Chair, Science & Technology Committee

Dr Sarah Wollaston
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee