What to do if you suspect fabricated data

(b) Suspected fabricated data in a published manuscript

Reader expresses suspicion of fabricated data

Thank reader and state your plans to investigate

Consider getting a 2nd opinion from another reviewer

Contact author to explain your concerns but do not make direct accusations

Author replies

No response

Attempt to contact all other authors (check Medline/Google for emails)

Author replies

No response

Contact author’s institution requesting your concern is passed to author’s superior and/or person responsible for research governance, if necessary coordinating with co-authors’ institutions

Satisfactory explanation

Apologise to author
Publish correction if necessary (e.g. if an honest error has been detected)
Inform reader of outcome

Unsatisfactory answer/admits guilt

Inform all authors you intend to contact institution/ regulatory body

Contact author’s institution requesting an investigation

No or unsatisfactory response

Author(s) guilty of fabrication

Publish retraction

Author(s) found not guilty

Apologise to author(s)

Contact regulatory body (e.g. GMC for UK doctors) requesting an enquiry

Author(s) found not guilty

No response

Contact regulatory body (e.g. GMC for UK doctors) requesting an enquiry

No response

Contact regulatory body (e.g. GMC for UK doctors) requesting an enquiry

No response

Inform reader of outcome

Inform reader of outcome

Apologise to author(s)

Inform reader of outcome

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