Science Ethics Education Course

Sir,

The recent article of the series on Scientific Ethics Education by Vuckovic-Dekic et al. is very interesting [1,2]. In part II, Vuckovic-Dekic et al. reported that “Even a short course in science ethics had a great impact on the attendees [2]”. Indeed, education should be the effective mean to fight the scientific fraud among medical researchers. However, success could be expected if the implementation of the education session start at an early period [3]. Honesty has to be inserted into the curriculum since the first study in the children’s home and kindergarten. The short course for medical researchers might show its good response by attitude assessment but this is not always connected with the real practice. Normally, one might respond in a good way when an attitude assessment is done. Nevertheless, it is agreeable that providing the opportunity to attend such scientific sessions is better than doing nothing. The next point should be how to implement the session to the younger generations.

Reply to Drs Joob and Wiwanitkit

Undoubtedly, Drs Joob and Wiwanitkit are right in each and every point: yes, any ethic education should start very early, even in kindergarten; yes, the good response by attitude assessment does not mean the actual practice; yes, at each educational level, the key word is honesty [1].

As Joob and Wiwanitkit pointed out, the science ethics education should be implemented to younger and younger generations. Indeed, we did so: during 10 years, we have been teaching science ethics to graduated medical students [2-4]. It was the very first of such courses in Serbia, and the first that young doctors had the opportunity to attend. These courses were a part of our efforts to promote good scientific practices in our country [5].

The course Drs Joob and Wiwanitkit are referring to was specifically targeted to PhD candidates [6]. Most of them learned about science ethics for the first time, and that is why we considered them as “naïve” population in this sense [7]. Therefore, we concluded that even such a short science ethics course improved both the knowledge and the attitude toward any kind of scientific dishonesty [8].

Certainly, we are aware that such an education, though undoubtedly important, is not enough: “... a growing body of evidence suggests that ethics education does not necessarily translate into ethical behavior” [9]. Nevertheless, since our attendees highly evaluated our lectures (unpublished data), and since they changed their attitude accordingly [8], we believe that this newly acquired knowledge on responsible conduct of research and good publication practices would enable them to avoid any questionable behavior and resolve conflict situations they may face in real life.

References


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