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CC: JAHA Editorial Office jaha@journalaha.org

January 29, 2020

Dear Drs. London, Eitzman, Weinberg and Harrington,

JAHA paper on e-cigarettes and myocardial infarction – response to JAHA reply

Further to the serious concerns we raised in our letter of January 20, 2020¹ about the Bhatta-Glantz paper on e-cigarettes and myocardial infarction published by JAHA,² we acknowledge receipt of your reply of January 23, 2020³. The issues raised relate primarily to publishing governance, but we are happy to copy our letters to the editorial team generic mailbox.

While we are grateful for your letter, we are disappointed that it does not amount to a substantive response to the concerns we raised about:

- (1) critical failures in the published paper itself;
- (2) the conduct of the authors in failing to make adjustments to their analysis with data they knew were available that would have addressed the problems with their analysis, though doing so would have undermined their original conclusion;
- (3) the process followed by the journal in the light of the whistleblower complaint made by Dr Brad Rodu in July 2019 and now followed up by us.

We welcome the commitment to due process asserted in your letter of January 23, 2020:

The AHA continues to follow the guidelines as outlined by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICJME) and the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), which include protecting the integrity of the scientific publishing process. No additional information is available at this time.

The COPE guidelines on retraction state:⁴



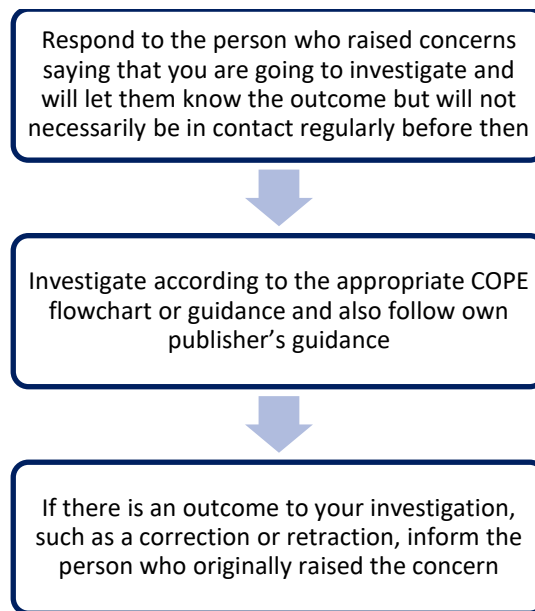
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Journal editors should consider retracting a publication if they have clear evidence that the findings are unreliable, either as a result of misconduct (e.g. data fabrication) or falsification (eg image manipulation) or honest error (e.g. miscalculation or experimental error).

Question 1. There is clear evidence that the findings are unreliable. Does the journal accept the findings are unreliable and what does the journal propose to do about the published paper?

Further, the COPE guidelines on handling concerns about scientific soundness raised directly by external ‘whistleblowers’ such as Rodu require a proper investigation and response once a substantive complaint is made and recognized as such.⁵



[Source: COPE⁵]

Question 2. Can you confirm whether there is or has been an investigation into this complaint, outline its current status and set out the outcome of the investigation if there is one so far?

We all support the American Heart Association’s stated commitment to research integrity and welcome its stated openness to concerns raised about published articles.

The American Heart Association is steadfastly committed to ensuring an objective and thorough evaluation of any and all inquiries received about studies published in any of our journals.

However, we believe that the Journal of the American Heart Association should give meaning to these aspirational statements in a real-world case such as this. To that end, we would welcome substantive answers to our questions 1 and 2 above.

Yours sincerely

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The signatories write in a personal capacity and declare no competing interests with respect to tobacco or e-cigarette industries. Full ICMJE disclosures are available on request.

References

- ¹ David Abrams and 15 others, letter to senior JAHA editorial staff, *JAHA paper on e-cigarettes and myocardial infarction*, 20 January, 2020 [[Archive](#)]
- ² Bhatta DN, Glantz SA. [Electronic Cigarette Use and Myocardial Infarction Among Adults in the US Population Assessment of Tobacco and Health](#). *J Am Heart Assoc*. 2019 Jun 18;8(12):e012317.
- ³ JAHA Editorial Office. Letter in reply to David Abrams and 15 others, January 23, 2020. [[Archive](#)]
- ⁴ Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), [Retraction guidelines 2019](#). 2019.
- ⁵ Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), [How to respond to whistle blowers when concerns are raised directly](#). 2019.