

Retraction Watch

Tracking retractions as a window into the scientific process

Elsevier retracting nine papers for fake peer review

with 9 comments

The fake peer review retraction count continues to mount.

Elsevier is retracting nine papers from five journals because fake email addresses for reviewers were provided during submission of the original manuscripts. According to a statement from the publisher:

Nine papers are being retracted from five Elsevier journals due to manipulation of the peer-review process that led to their publication. The retractions follow a thorough investigation using industry best practices as outlined by the [Committee on Publication Ethics](#). The integrity of the editorial process was found to have been undermined by faked review reports linked to fictitious email addresses, provided to the journal as a suggested reviewer during submission.

Elsevier has retracted more than 20 [other papers](#) for the [same reason since 2012](#). The number of papers retracted for fake peer reviews across all publishers now [stands at about 260](#).

All but two of the notices will read as follows:

This article has been retracted: please see Elsevier Policy on Article Withdrawal (<http://www.elsevier.com/locate/withdrawalpolicy>).

This article has been retracted at the request of the Editor and the Publisher.

After a thorough investigation, the Publisher has concluded that the acceptance of this article was based upon the positive advice of at least one faked reviewer report. The report was submitted from a fictitious email account which was provided to the journal as a suggested reviewer by the corresponding author during the submission of the paper.

This manipulation of the peer-review process represents a clear violation of the fundamentals of peer review, our publishing policies, and publishing ethics standards. Apologies are offered to the reviewers whose identities were assumed and to the readers of the journal that this deception was not detected during the submission process.

Here are the seven papers that are slated for retraction:

- [“Predictive and prognostic value of ER- \$\alpha\$ 36 expression in breast cancer patients treated with chemotherapy,”](#) in *Steroids* (cited once, according to Thomson Scientific’s Web of Knowledge)
- [“The synergistic effect between \$\beta\$ -amyloid₁₋₄₂ and \$\alpha\$ -synuclein on the synapses dysfunction in hippocampal neurons,”](#) *Journal of Chemical Neuroanatomy* (cited once)
- [“Protein-protein interaction and SNP analysis in intraductal papillary mucinous](#)

- [neoplasm](#),” *Gene* (cited twice)
- “[Candidate agents for pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma identified by a sub-pathway based method](#),” *Gene* (not yet cited)
- “[Microarray analysis of microRNA expression in liver cancer tissues and normal control](#),” *Gene* (cited 8 times)
- “[Association of TNF- \$\alpha\$ -308G>A polymorphisms with hepatocellular carcinoma in Han Chinese population: A systematic review and meta-analysis](#),” *Clinics and Research in Hepatology and Gastroenterology* (in press; not yet indexed)
- “[Correlations between peroxisome proliferator activator receptor \$\gamma\$, Cystatin C, or advanced oxidation protein product, and atherosclerosis in diabetes patients](#),” *Pathology – Research and Practice* (not yet cited)

Retractions for two of the papers have already appeared in the *Brazilian Journal of Infectious Diseases*, with slightly different retraction notices. For one, “[The rapid and sustained responses of dendritic cells to influenza virus infection in a non-human primate model](#)” (cited once), it appears as if the publisher suspects there was at least one fake review and perhaps even a fake author:

This article has been retracted: please see Elsevier Policy on Article Withdrawal (<http://www.elsevier.com/locate/withdrawalpolicy>).

This article has been retracted at the request of the Editor and the Publisher.

After a thorough investigation, the Publisher has concluded that the acceptance of this article was based upon the positive advice of at least one faked reviewer report. The report was submitted from a fictitious email account which was provided to the journal as a suggested reviewer by the first author during the submission of the paper. The first author has created the email account kevinsharrod@hotmail.com identifying and representing himself as the apparent corresponding author of the above article.

This manipulation of the peer-review process represents a clear violation of the fundamentals of peer review, our publishing policies, and publishing ethics standards. Apologies are offered to the reviewers whose identities were assumed and to the readers of the journal that this deception was not detected during the submission process.

We’ve asked [Harrod](#) — of the University of Alabama, Birmingham — if he was even aware that his name was on this particular paper.

And here’s the notice for “[Antiviral and myocyte protective effects of IL-28A in coxsackievirus B3-induced myocarditis](#),” a paper also cited once:

This article has been retracted: please see Elsevier Policy on Article Withdrawal (<http://www.elsevier.com/locate/withdrawalpolicy>).

This article has been retracted at the request of the Editor and the Publisher.

After a thorough investigation, the Publisher has concluded that the peer-review process has been compromised and the scientific integrity of the paper cannot be guaranteed. Reviewer reports were submitted from email accounts which were provided to the journal as suggested reviewers by the corresponding author during the submission of the paper. However no confirmation has been received from those accounts upon further request from the Publisher to endorse that they were indeed the persons who completed the reviews and that the non-

institutional email addresses were of them.

This manipulation of the peer-review process represents a clear violation of the fundamentals of peer review, our publishing policies, and publishing ethics standards. Apologies are offered to the readers of the journal that this deception was not detected during the submission process.

Elsevier tells us that they have taken a number of steps to prevent these kinds of cases happening in the future:

Elsevier's continuing advice to our editors is to be alert to such potential abuse, which is rare but serious. Editorial best practice is to always invite additional reviewers who were not suggested by author and to exercise caution if using author-suggested reviewers with non-institutional emails who the editor does not personally know. Elsevier editors can make use of Scopus to validate that the suggested reviewer's email address provided is legitimate, a validation step that we plan to automate in the near future in our new editorial system, Evise.

The practice of some journals to also consider the comments of a reviewer suggested by the author reflects a dilemma that faces all journals in an increasingly competitive environment: the challenge of finding reviewers with the expertise, time and willingness to review. Elsevier is heavily invested in supporting our editors in this challenge by providing them with best-in-class tools. [Last year, we upgraded our current "Find Reviewers" tool](#) and even more powerful tools for finding independent reviewers [are under development within Evise](#). We are equally committed to ensuring that that reviewers receive the maximum recognition for their invaluable contribution, and recently announced an exciting expansion of our [Reviewer Recognition program](#).

We've reached out to all corresponding authors of the retracted papers.

Update 10/13/15 10:01 a.m. eastern: We heard from a representative of Elsevier that Harrod was not, in fact, an author on the [above mentioned paper](#):

Dr Harrod and the first author, Dr Jie, have informed us that Dr Harrod was unaware of the paper at the time of submission. Apparently, the paper was written while Dr Jie was working at Dr Harrod's institute in the US but was submitted after Dr Jie returned to Fudan University.

Update 10/13/15 2:17 p.m. eastern: Harrod confirmed to us that the paper was submitted without his approval, using a fake email address.