COMPLAINT TO REED ELSEVIER, PUBLISHERS OF *THE LANCET*

RESPONSIBILITY, HONESTY AND TRANSPARENCY ARE THE ESSENTIAL BASIS OF ETHICAL MEDICAL AND SCIENTIFIC PUBLISHING

- We, the undersigned, vigorously protest:

  1) the grossly irresponsible and damaging editorial misuse of *The Lancet* for political purposes and

  2) the abject failure of the owner/publisher, Reed Elsevier, to enforce appropriate ethical standards of editorship.

- "An open letter for the people in Gaza" by Manduca et al, published in *The Lancet* on July 22, 2014 consists of numerous vicious and deliberately inflammatory falsehoods, omissions and abusive dishonesty, which have no place in any responsible publication.

- *The Lancet*, its editor, Richard Horton, and the owner/publisher, Reed Elsevier, should comprehensively retract the article and formally apologize for their grave breach of editorial ethics. It is inconceivable that such stereotypical extremist hate propaganda, under the selective and hypocritical disguise of medical concern, should remain available on the pages of any reputable journal.

- The collaboration of the academic community with Reed Elsevier and its journals is based on trust in their maintaining high ethical and scientific standards. None of us is under any obligation to submit and review material for publication in their journals or to serve on their editorial or advisory boards.

- We invite all scientists and clinicians who value honesty and ethical conduct in publication to support this complaint by adding your signature at [http://concernedacademics.org](http://concernedacademics.org) so that we can inform Reed Elsevier about the depth of concern among the professionals on whom they depend for their business.

- The primary role of all professional scientific and medical journals is to publish material which is rigorously and independently peer reviewed. In the case of reviews and opinion pieces it must at least comply with fundamental requirements of honest and fully transparent disclosure of actual or potential conflicts of interest.

- Failure to apply the normal rigorous standards of honesty and transparency to Commentary and Opinion pieces with overtly political content is a particular betrayal. Publication in a journal which is assumed to have such standards provides a false impression of reliability and a level of recognition which would otherwise not exist.
• *The Lancet*, owned by Reed Elsevier, is one of the major general medical journals. It has been misused by its editor-in-chief, Dr Richard Horton, as a vehicle for his own eclectic personal and political agenda, at times characterized by flagrantly irresponsible publications. The worst examples of this are the MMR vaccine scare of 1998 and “An open letter for the people in Gaza” by Manduca *et al* published on July 22, 2014.

• In 1998 Horton published the scientifically fraudulent ‘MMR vaccine causes autism’ scare, authored by Andrew Wakefield. Horton and Wakefield had trained as junior doctors in the same clinical team and been mentored by the same senior physician. *The Lancet*’s publication of the Wakefield fraud, which was transparently deeply flawed from the outset, seriously damaged vaccination programs worldwide (http://tinyurl.com/37xcud). The consequent illness, maiming and death of children continue to this day, for example, there are already over 150 cases in the current measles outbreak linked to Disneyland in California. It took Horton 12 years to retract the paper that caused this disaster although it was clear from the start that its publication was recklessly irresponsible (http://tinyurl.com/kqw6bhc).

• The second example is Horton’s persistent and inappropriate misuse of *The Lancet* to mount a sustained political vendetta concerning the Israel – Palestinian conflict, to promote his own well known personal political agenda.¹

• The *Lancet* publications on this topic flout many of the key ethical requirements of responsible publishing as outlined in the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) Code of Conduct.

• COPE issued a *Code of Conduct and Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors* as well as *Retraction Guidelines*.
  1) Horton, editor-in-chief of *The Lancet*, is an Honorary Member of COPE² but also participated in the development of these guidelines.³
  2) The guidelines’ goals: “COPE aims to define best practice in the ethics of scholarly publishing and to assist editors, editorial board members, owners of journals and publishers to achieve this.”

• The COPE guidelines include:
  1) “always be willing to publish corrections, clarifications, rejections and apologies when needed”
  2) “ensuring that non-peer-reviewed sections of their journal are clearly identified”
  3) “considering developing a transparency policy to encourage maximum disclosure about the provenance of non-research articles”
  4) “supporting initiatives designed to reduce research and publication misconduct”
  5) “maintain[ing] the integrity of the academic record”

² See http://publicationethics.org/members/honorary-member-0
³ “COPE’s first guidelines were developed by Philip Fulford, Michael Doherty, Jane Smith, Richard Smith, Fiona Godlee, Peter Wilmhurst, Richard Horton and Michael Farthing...” See http://publicationethics.org/resources/code-conduct
• Deliberate, selective abandonment of these essential industry-wide best practices by a journal editor is recklessly irresponsible. It betrays the scientific process and can cause grave damage to knowledge, scientific and medical progress and the public health.

• Under the direction of Horton, The Lancet has become a vehicle for publication of deliberately false material which deepens polarization between Israelis and Palestinians, and does nothing to promote either global health or the health of those involved in this conflict.

• The most recent example of such a diatribe, “An open letter for the people in Gaza” by Manduca et al contains false assertions, unverifiable dishonest ‘facts’, many of them libellous, and glaring omissions, while deliberately concealing the grossest possible conflicts of interest of its authors, as acknowledged by The Lancet’s Ombudsman. Two of the authors (Manduca and Swee Ang) promoted an anti-Semitic video by American white supremacist David Duke. Chalmers, another co-author, has publicly spoken of how “Zionists” have “control in so many different domains.” These blatant anti-Semitic messages and speeches are well documented and readily accessible.

• The Manduca et al publication is thus a disgraceful paradigm of malignant wilful disregard of honest and ethical medical authorship and editorship.

• The ombudsman system of The Lancet has fallen far short in addressing how this atrocious and irresponsibly harmful material was published and clearly is unwilling and/or unable to enforce even remote compliance with the COPE principles.

• Reed Elsevier, which owns The Lancet, has not responded meaningfully in any way to numerous communications from physicians, researchers and scientists protesting these failings, including a petition with over 4,000 signatures (http://tinyurl.com/obrmjhy). Indeed we note that Reed Elsevier profited financially from the scandalous Lancet publication of the lethal MMR scare and continues to profit from The Lancet’s current polarizing and overtly political agenda.

• There has been no adequate response from The Lancet to the existing channels for complaint. There has been no response at all from Reed Elsevier to explicit direct complaints by a very wide range of senior medical professionals worldwide.

• We accuse Reed Elsevier of irresponsible and unethical business practice – profiting from the publication of dishonest and malicious material that incites hatred and violence. We demonstrate to them the depth and breadth of disapproval by the profession. We require Reed Elsevier to behave ethically


6 “Medical NGOs, Political Warfare and The Lancet,” NGO Monitor, January 22, 2015, available at http://www.ngo-monitor.org/article/medical_ngos_political_warfare_and_the_lancet
by retracting the Manduca letter, apologizing for its publication and ensuring that any further editorial malpractice at The Lancet is prevented.

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Key issues

Editorial standards

Maintaining the integrity of what we publish is vital to the confidence of customers and other stakeholders. The Editorial Policy stipulates our responsibility to make clear distinctions between fact and opinion and user-generated or other content and encourages dialogue, including through social media. In the year, we translated the Group’s Editorial Policy into 12 languages. The Policy commits us to producing information of the highest quality and embraces, among other key issues, accuracy, clarity and timeliness, avoiding bias, defamation, conflict of interest and plagiarism; and distinguishing between editorial and advertising. In 2014, we also created and rolled out an Editorial Policy for Suppliers and launched Quality First Principles with a message to all employees from the Chief Legal Officer and Company Secretary. More than 100 employees and other stakeholders helped develop the Principles, and a new Quality First Working Group has been formed.

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Responding to customer needs

Our value Customer focus means that we listen to customers. In 2014, we surveyed over 450,000 customers through Net Promoter Score (NPS) measuring customer loyalty and business dashboard programs. This deepens our understanding of their needs and drives a customer-centric culture across the Group. Results, reviewed by the CEO and senior managers and communicated to staff, highlight where we are doing well and where we must do better.

At Elsevier, NPS results are shared quarterly with all staff; when opportunities for improvement are identified, they are empowered to make changes. The focus on constant improvement has led to a 16-point improvement since 2007 in the NPS scores from authors, based on responses from approximately 50,000 authors each year.

Elsevier utilises a comprehensive customer dashboard approach to customer satisfaction. Ongoing customer input is analysed and reported by Elsevier’s Research and Academic Relations Department to all staff on the Elsevier intranet with simple green (performing better than competition), yellow (performing the same as competition) and red (performing worse than competition) scoring by customer type and product (e.g., for journal authors, metrics include referencing and production speed and quality). Increasingly available in real time, the dashboard helps embed customer views into daily workflows to ensure customer focus and responsiveness.

In 2014, Elsevier CEO Ron Mobed held town hall and group meetings to provide opportunities for colleagues to share information about customer-focused initiatives underway. As he explained, "Creating information solutions that reflect deep customer insight requires us to be talking and listening to customers about what they need and how they work. It also requires us to share that knowledge within Elsevier - so we can draw on the wider strengths of the people within the company, and so that others can draw from those insights to create solutions within our domains." He asked colleagues to contribute ideas for being a company that excels in knowledge-sharing.

June 2014 Library Connect event on developing academic libraries with Nazarbayev University in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Elsevier’s Library Connect publications, events and online channels provide library and information science (LIS) professionals worldwide with opportunities for knowledge sharing. In 2014, more than 16,000 LIS professionals from 130 countries subscribed to the Library Connect Newsletter, a complimentary publication covering LIS best practices, trends and technology. More than 4,800 LIS professionals from 100 countries participated in a Library Connect webinar, and in-person seminars and workshops were held for participants from 13 countries. The Library Connect website, containing hundreds of articles, infographics, videos and other resources, had approximately 64,000 visitors from 190 nations and territories in 2014.

To aid colleagues who engage with customers, during the year we worked to incorporate CRM into customer-facing staff training with outreach to key sales and marketing teams. We have updated our intranet resource, CR as a Sales Tool; created a CR Fast Facts document for distribution across the business; and developed new CRM Sales Academy content.