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## 1. Copyright

### 1.1 Copyright licensing

Copyright on work published by AOSIS is retained by the author(s) of the work.

### 1.2 Protecting intellectual property

The exclusive responsibility, in respect of the acknowledgment of third-party copyright, rests with the responsible author(s). The editor(s), AOSIS and title owner of each journal or book further accept no responsibility for any statement made or opinion expressed in authored works published in an AOSIS journal or book, and hence cannot accept responsibility for the infringement of third-party copyright.

## 2. Publication licensing

Author(s) of work published by AOSIS are asked to grant AOSIS the unlimited rights to publish the work in any format, language and medium, for any lawful purpose. We require authors to publish their work under the Creative Commons Attribution License (Creative Commons Attribution License 3.0). This licence allows third parties to share the published work (copy, distribute, transmit) and to adapt it, on condition that the work and its source are attributed on every instance of use.

AOSIS permits authors to circulate and post the final published version of their work on their institutional repository or any other website, under the provisions set out under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

## 3. Authors

### 3.1 General

AOSIS does not require all authors to sign the letter of submission to a journal or book domain. Submission to AOSIS is taken to mean that all the listed authors have agreed on all of the manuscript contents. The corresponding (submitting) author is responsible for having ensured that this agreement has been reached, and for managing all communication between AOSIS and all co-authors, before and after publication. Any changes to the author list after submission, such as a change in the order of the authors, or the deletion or addition of authors, needs to be approved in a letter signed by every author (refer to 3.1.2).

#### 3.1.1 Publication based on the work of a student

A student should preferably be listed as *principal author* on multiple-authored publications that substantially derive from the student's dissertation or thesis. If the student explicitly declines the implied co-author responsibilities, the role of the student must be outlined in a section entitled 'acknowledgements' and he/she must be informed as such to avoid any misunderstanding. Likewise, the supervisor of a student should be involved as *co-author* in publications that substantially derive from the student's dissertation or thesis overseen/promoted by such supervisor. If the supervisor explicitly declines the implied co-author responsibilities, the role of the supervisor must be outlined in the 'acknowledgements' section and he/she must be informed as such to avoid any misunderstanding.

#### 3.1.2 Authorship/affiliation changes or disputes

Requests for changes in or disputes as to the list of authors (or their affiliations) of a manuscript after initial submission, or after publication, will be subject to the

guidelines as prescribed by the Committee of Publication Ethics (COPE) (<http://publicationethics.org/resources/flowcharts>) to resolve the matter. This implies that all authors need to agree on any such changes.

### 3.2 Responsibilities of senior team members on multi-group collaborations

The editors at AOSIS assume that at least one member of each collaboration, usually the most senior member of each submitting group or team, has accepted responsibility for the contributions to the manuscript from that team. This responsibility includes, but is not limited to: (1) ensuring that original data upon which the submission is based are preserved and retrievable for reanalysis; (2) approving data presentation as representative of the original data; and (3) foreseeing and minimising obstacles to the sharing of data, materials, algorithms or reagents described in the work.

### 3.3 Authorship guidelines

Authors should take collective responsibility for submitted and published work. The research literature serves as a record not only of what has been discovered but also of who made the discovery. The authorship of research publications should therefore accurately reflect individuals' contributions to the work and its reporting.

It is generally accepted that individuals are entitled to authorship of a manuscript when they meet all three criteria listed below:

1. Made a substantial contribution to conception and design, *or* acquisition of data, *or* analysis and interpretation of data; *and*
2. Drafted the article or revised it critically for important intellectual content; *and*
3. Approved the final version to be published.

Contributions that fall short of meeting all these criteria should rather be mentioned in the 'acknowledgements' section of the manuscript. This includes the involvement of a professional writer. Acquisition of funding, collection of data, or general supervision of the research group, alone does not justify authorship. All persons designated as authors should qualify for authorship, and all those who qualify should be listed.

### 3.4 Author contributions statements

Authors who collaborated on published work share a degree of responsibility for all or part of the work. Each author should have participated in the work sufficiently to take public responsibility for appropriate portions of the content.

Authors are required to include a statement of responsibility in the manuscript that specifies the contribution of every author. The level of detail varies; some disciplines produce manuscripts that comprise discrete efforts readily articulated in detail, whereas other fields operate as group efforts at all stages.

A paragraph briefly summarising the nature of the contributions made by each of the authors listed should be along the lines of the following example:

J.K. (University of Pretoria) was the project leader, L.M.N. (University of Johannesburg) and A.B. (University of Johannesburg) were responsible for experimental and project design. L.M.N. performed most of the experiments. P.R. (University of the Western Cape) made conceptual contributions, whilst S.T. (University of Pretoria), U.V. (University of Pretoria) and C.D. (University of Pretoria) also performed some of the experiments. S.M. (University of Johannesburg) and V.C. (University of Johannesburg) prepared the samples,

and calculations were performed by C.S. (University of Johannesburg). J.K. (University of Pretoria) and U.V. (University of Pretoria) co-wrote the manuscript.

The affiliation of authors must reflect the situation during the conducting and completion of the research/work. If an author has changed affiliation since the completion of the research/work, a second affiliation ('current affiliation') may be specified.

### 3.5 Corresponding author – prepublication responsibilities

Groups of authors will decide who is to be the individual acting as the *corresponding author* on behalf of all authors during the submission, review and publication processes. The corresponding author must submit the manuscript and related files and all required data and information to AOSIS. From the point of submission through to publication, all communication related to that manuscript will be directed to and received from the corresponding author only.

The corresponding (submitting) author is solely responsible for communicating with AOSIS and with managing communication between co-authors. Before submission, the corresponding author ensures that all authors are included in the author list, its order has been agreed by all authors, and all authors are aware that the manuscript was submitted.

After acceptance, a proof is sent to the corresponding author, who circulates it to all co-authors and deals with AOSIS on their behalf; AOSIS will not necessarily correct errors after publication if they result from errors that were present on a proof that was not shown to co-authors before publication. The corresponding author is responsible for the accuracy of all content in the proof, in particular that names of co-authors are present and correctly spelled, and that addresses and affiliations are current.

### 3.6 Corresponding author – responsibilities after publication

AOSIS regards the corresponding author as the point of contact for queries about the published work. It is this author's responsibility to inform all co-authors of matters arising and to ensure such matters are dealt with promptly. This author does not have to be the senior author of the work or the author who actually supplies material; this author's role is to ensure enquiries are answered promptly on behalf of all the co-authors. The name and email address of this author (on large collaborations, there may be two) is published in the final work.

### 3.7 Correcting the record

Authors of published material have a responsibility to inform AOSIS promptly if they become aware of any part that requires correcting. Any published correction requires the consent of all co-authors, so time is saved if requests for corrections are accompanied by a signed agreement by all authors (in the form of a scanned attachment to an email, or as one combined email containing agreement messages from all the authors). In cases where one or some authors do not agree with the correction statement, the coordinating author must include correspondence to and from the dissenting author(s) as part of the scanned attachment or composite email.

#### 3.7.1 Accurate preservation and correction of errors after publication

AOSIS is committed to preserving the historical accuracy of all its publications. In principle, no published work should be altered or removed from the print or electronic AOSIS platforms after it has been published.

AOSIS considers the version of an article/work published online as the final and complete version. Even though it may be possible to correct this version, the policy is not to do so, except in very specific circumstances.

### 3.7.1.1 Corrections to AOSIS work

If a very serious error is discovered after publication of an AOSIS work, the editors will decide whether to amend the AOSIS work. If a correction is made to the online version, a note is added to state that: firstly, there was an error in the previous version of the work; secondly, the error has since been corrected in the HTML and PDF versions; and thirdly, that the article will be republished correctly. When the article is republished, it will carry a publication date in the following style: Published online: 09 January 2007; Re-published: 10 January 2007.

Corrections that do not affect the contribution in a material way or significantly impair the reader's understanding of the contribution (such as a spelling mistake or a grammatical error) will not be considered.

#### Detailed description of correction types:

- **Errata (erratum)** will be used if an important error has been introduced during the production of the work (one that affects the publication record, the scientific integrity of the work, or the reputation of the authors or of the work), including errors of omission such as failure to make factual proof corrections requested by authors within the deadline provided by AOSIS and within the AOSIS policy. Errata for typing errors will not be published, except where an apparently simple error is significant (for example, an incorrect unit). A significant error in a figure or table is corrected by publication of a new corrected figure or table as an erratum only if the editor considers this necessary for a reader to understand it.
- **Corrigenda (corrigendum)** are a notification of an important error made by the authors of the work. Corrigenda are judged on their relevance to readers and their importance for the published record. Corrigenda are published after discussion amongst the editors (typically including the editors who handled the published contribution), often with the help of peer reviewers. All co-authors must sign an agreed wording. Corrigenda submitted by the original authors are published if the scientific accuracy or reproducibility of the original work is compromised; occasionally, on investigation by the editors, these may be published as retractions. In cases where some co-authors decline to sign a corrigendum or retraction, AOSIS in consultation with the editors reserves the right to publish it with the dissenting author(s) identified. AOSIS publishes corrigenda if there is an error in the published author list, but not for overlooked acknowledgements.
- **Addenda (addendum)** are a notification of a peer-reviewed addition of information to work (for example, in response to a reader's request for clarification). Addenda should not contradict the original publication, but if the author inadvertently omitted significant information available at the time, this material can be published as an addendum after peer review and after discussion amongst the editors. Addenda are published only rarely and only when the editors decide that the addendum is crucial to the readers' understanding of a significant part of the published contribution.
- **Retraction** is a notification of invalid results or a sanction applied to misconduct, which is held to comprise the validity and reliability of the work. Retractions with respect to *invalid results* are made when the conclusions of a work are seriously undermined as a result of miscalculation or error. Retractions with respect to a *sanction applied to*



*misconduct* are made when there has been an infringement of publishing ethics or a breach of author warranties, which can include breaches of third-party copyright. Infringements of professional ethical codes, such as multiple submission, bogus claims of authorship, plagiarism, fraudulent use of data, or the like, will also result in an article being retracted. All co-authors will be asked to agree to a retraction. In cases where some co-authors decline to sign a retraction, AOSIS in consultation with the editors reserves the right to publish the retraction with reference to the dissension amongst authors. Retracted work will be clearly indicated and bear a 'retracted' watermark throughout; however, in rare circumstances it may be necessary to remove work completely from the online location. This will occur only where the article infringes others' legal rights, or is clearly defamatory, or where the work is (or clearly may be) the subject of a court order, or where the work's information might pose a serious health risk. In these circumstances, whilst the bibliographic information (title and authors) will be retained online, the text will be replaced with a page indicating that the article has been removed for legal reasons.

AOSIS has a duty to publish corrections (errata) when errors could affect the interpretation of data or information, whatever the cause of the error (for example, arising from author errors or from editorial mishaps). Likewise, AOSIS will publish 'retractions' if work is proven to be fraudulent, or 'expressions of concern' if AOSIS' editors have well-founded suspicions of misconduct.

#### **Upon publication, AOSIS will ensure:**

- The title of the erratum, retraction, or expression of concern will include the words 'Erratum', 'Retraction', or 'Expression of concern'.
- It will be published on a numbered page (print and electronic) and be listed in the book/journal's table of contents.
- It will cite the original work.
- It will enable the reader to identify and understand the correction in the context of the errors made, or explain why the work is being retracted, or explain the editor's concerns about the contents of the work.
- It will be linked electronically with the original electronic publication, wherever possible.
- It will be in a form that enables indexing and abstracting services to identify and link errata, retractions, and expressions of concern to their original publications.

#### **Detailed description of our readers' responsibilities**

Readers wishing to draw AOSIS's attention to:

- A significant published error should submit a Correspondence item. This procedure is a mechanism for investigating readers' comments and does not imply that the comment will be published. In cases where a significant error is confirmed after taking the advice of peer reviewers, such comments will be published in one of the categories of amendment described above.
- Published manuscripts requiring retraction should first contact the authors of the original work and then write to the book/journal, including copies of the correspondence with the authors (whether or not the correspondence has been answered). The editors will seek advice from reviewers if they judge that the information is likely to call into question the main conclusions of the published manuscripts.

### 3.7.1.2 Flowcharts from Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)

- **What to do if you suspect a reviewer has appropriated an author's idea or data**  
[What to do if you suspect a reviewer has appropriated an author's idea or data \[PDF, 88KB\]](#)
- **What to do if you suspect plagiarism**  
[Suspected plagiarism in a submitted manuscript \[PDF, 80KB\]](#)  
[Suspected plagiarism in a published manuscript \[PDF, 116KB\]](#)
- **What to do if you suspect redundant (duplicate) publication**  
[Suspected redundant publication in a submitted manuscript \[PDF, 60KB\]](#)  
[Suspected redundant publication in a published manuscript \[PDF, 84KB\]](#)
- **Changes in authorship**  
[Corresponding author requests addition of extra author before publication \[PDF, 52KB\]](#)  
[Corresponding author requests removal of author before publication \[PDF, 52KB\]](#)  
[Request for addition of extra author after publication \[PDF, 60KB\]](#)  
[Request for removal of author after publication \[PDF, 68KB\]](#)  
[Suspected guest, ghost or gift authorship \[PDF, 76KB\]](#)  
[How to spot authorship problems \[PDF, 64KB\]](#)
- **Conflict of interest**  
[What to do if a reviewer suspects undisclosed conflict of interest \(Col\) in a submitted manuscript \[PDF, 110KB\]](#)  
[What to do if a reader suspects undisclosed conflict of interest \(Col\) in a published article \[PDF, 112KB\]](#)
- **What to do if you suspect an ethical problem**  
[What to do if you suspect an ethical problem with a submitted manuscript \[PDF, 68KB\]](#)
- **What to do if you suspect fabricated data**  
[What to do if you suspect an ethical problem with a submitted manuscript \[PDF, 111KB\]](#)  
[Suspected fabricated data in a published manuscript \[PDF, 114KB\]](#)

## 3.8 A confidential process

AOSIS editors treat the submitted manuscripts and all communication with authors and referees as confidential. Authors must also treat communication with AOSIS as confidential: correspondence with the publisher, reviewers' reports and other confidential material must not be posted on any website or otherwise publicised without prior permission from AOSIS or editors, whether or not the submission is eventually published.

## 3.9 Appeals

Authors have a right to appeal editorial decisions.

- Our scientific journal/book editors have mechanisms for authors to appeal peer-review decisions.
- An editor mediates all exchanges between authors and peer reviewers during the peer-review process (i.e. prior to publication). If agreement



cannot be reached, editors should consider inviting comments from additional peer reviewer(s), if the editor feels that this would be helpful.

- AOSIS supports the notion that an editor's decision following such an appeal is final.

### 3.10 Referee suggestions

Authors are welcome to suggest suitable independent reviewers when they submit their manuscripts, but these suggested reviewers may not be used to review their manuscript at AOSIS. Authors may also request AOSIS to exclude a few (usually not more than two) individuals or laboratories. AOSIS and its editors consider such exclusion requests sympathetically and usually honour them, but the editor's decision on the choice of peer reviewers is final.

### 3.11 Competing interests

Any relevant competing interests of authors or reviewers must be available to editors during the review process and must be declared by authors in published work. Conflict of interest exists when an author/reviewer (or the author's/reviewer's institution) has financial or personal relationships with other persons or organisations that inappropriately influence (bias) his/her opinions or actions. [Modified from: Davidoff F, et al. Sponsorship, Authorship, and Accountability. (Editorial), *JAMA* 2001;286(10).]

For authors: Authors must declare: (1) all sources of research funding, including direct and indirect financial support, supply of equipment or materials, or other forms of conflict of interest, which may have prevented them from executing and publishing unbiased research; (2) the role of the research funder(s) or sponsor (if any) in the research design, execution, analysis, interpretation and reporting; and (3) any other relevant financial and non-financial interests and relationships that might be considered likely to affect the interpretation of their findings or which editors, reviewers or readers might reasonably wish to know. This includes any relationship to the book/journal (for example, if editors wish to publish their own research in their own work).

For reviewers: Reviewers must declare all forms of conflict of interest which may prevent them from executing and performing an unbiased review on the research. The following declaration may be used if appropriate: 'I declare that I have no financial or personal relationship(s) which may have inappropriately influenced me in writing/reviewing this manuscript.'

## 4. Reviewers

The following types of contributions to AOSIS are peer reviewed: Original Research, Review Articles, Research Letters, monographs, essays, and conference proceedings. Other contributed articles are not usually peer reviewed.

Nevertheless, articles published in these sections, particularly if they present technical information, may be peer reviewed at the discretion of the editors. All book types are peer reviewed, unless stated otherwise.

Peer review is seen as a collaborative process that allows research to be evaluated and commented upon by independent experts who work within the same academic field as the authors. Peer review helps to improve manuscripts and allows the editor to assess the works' suitability for publication.

Unless otherwise indicated, identities of the reviewers and the authors are unknown to each other. Such anonymity is designed to encourage fairness, with works being considered solely on their individual merits.

#### 4.1 Online manuscript review

Peer reviewers are asked to submit their reports via AOSIS's own secure online system by following the link provided in the editor's email. There is an online help guide to assist in using the system, and a helpdesk email account for any technical problems.

#### 4.2 Criteria for publication

To publish with AOSIS, the work should meet four general criteria:

- Provide strong evidence for its conclusions.
- Present novel findings.
- Be of importance to scientists in the specific field.
- Ideally, be interesting to researchers in other related disciplines.

In general, to be acceptable, the work should represent an advance in understanding that is likely to influence thinking in the field.

#### 4.3 The review process

All submitted manuscripts are read by the editorial staff. To save time for authors and peer reviewers, only work that seems most likely to meet our editorial criteria is sent for formal review. Those manuscripts judged by the editors to be of insufficient general interest or otherwise inappropriate for AOSIS are rejected (desk rejected) promptly without external review. These decisions may also be based on informal advice from specialists in the field.

Manuscripts judged to be of potential interest to our readership are sent for formal review, typically to two or three reviewers but sometimes more if special advice is needed. The editors then make a decision based on the reviewers' advice, from amongst several possibilities:

- Accept submission, with or without editorial revisions.
- Invite the authors to revise their manuscript (Revisions required) to address specific concerns before a final decision is reached.
- Reject, but indicate to the authors that further work might justify a resubmission (Decline submission, resubmission encouraged).
- Reject outright (Decline submission), typically on the grounds of specialist interest, lack of novelty, insufficient conceptual advance or major technical and/or interpretational problems.

Reviewers are welcome to recommend a particular course of action, but should bear in mind that the other reviewers of a particular manuscript may have different technical expertise and/or views, and the editors may have to make a decision based on conflicting advice. The most useful reports, therefore, provide

the editors with the information upon which a decision should be based. Setting out the arguments for and against publication is often more helpful to the editors than a direct recommendation one way or the other.

Editorial decisions are not a matter of counting votes or numerical rank assessments, and we do not always follow the majority recommendation. We try to evaluate the strength of the arguments raised by each reviewer and by the authors, and may also consider other information not available to either party. Our primary responsibilities are to our readers and to the scientific community at large, and in deciding how best to serve them we must weigh the claims of each manuscript against the many others also under consideration.

We may return to reviewers for further advice, particularly in cases where they disagree with each other, or where the authors believe they have been misunderstood on points of fact. We therefore ask that reviewers should be willing to provide follow-up advice as requested. We are very aware, however, that reviewers are usually reluctant to be drawn into prolonged disputes, so we try to keep consultation to the minimum as we judge necessary to provide a fair hearing for the authors.

When reviewers agree to assess a manuscript we consider this a commitment to review subsequent revisions. However, editors will not send a resubmitted manuscript back to the reviewers if it seems that the authors have not made a serious attempt to address the criticisms.

We take reviewers' criticisms seriously; in particular, we are very reluctant to disregard technical criticisms. In cases where one reviewer alone opposes publication, we may consult the other reviewers as to whether s/he is applying an unduly critical standard. We occasionally bring in additional reviewers to resolve disputes, but prefer to avoid doing so unless there is a specific issue (for example, a specialist technical point) on which we feel the need for further advice.

#### 4.4 Selecting peer reviewers

Reviewer selection is critical to the publication process, and we base our choice on many factors, including expertise, reputation, specific recommendations and our own previous experience of a reviewer's characteristics. For instance, we avoid using people who are slow, careless, or do not provide reasoning for their views, whether harsh or lenient.

We check with potential reviewers before sending them manuscripts to review. Reviewers should bear in mind that these messages contain confidential information, which should be treated as such.

AOSIS works with the intention that our:

- Editors should strive to establish and maintain a database of suitably qualified peer reviewers.
- Editors should consider objectively monitoring the performance of peer reviewers/editorial board members and recording the quality and timeliness of their reviews. Editors should ignore rude, defamatory peer

reviews. Peer reviewers who repeatedly produce poor-quality, tardy, abusive or unconstructive reviews should not be used again.

- Editors should encourage peer reviewers to identify if they have a conflict of interest with the material they are being asked to review, and should ask that peer reviewers decline invitations requesting peer review where any circumstances might prevent them from producing a fair peer review.
- Editors can register peer reviewers suggested by authors, but should not consider suggestions made by authors as binding.
- Editors should request that peer reviewers who delegate peer review to members of their staff inform the editor when this occurs, as peer review is a confidential process.

#### 4.5 Writing the review

The primary purpose of the review is to provide the editors with the information needed to reach a decision. The review should also instruct the authors on how they can strengthen their manuscript to the point where it may be acceptable. As far as possible, a negative review should explain to the authors the weaknesses of their manuscript, so that rejected authors can understand the basis for the decision and see in broad terms what needs to be done to improve the manuscript for publication elsewhere. This is secondary to the other functions, however, and referees should not feel obliged to provide detailed, constructive advice to authors of manuscripts that do not meet the criteria for the book/journal (as outlined in the letter from the editor when asking for the review). If the reviewer believes that a manuscript would not be suitable for publication, his/her report to the author should be as brief as is consistent with enabling the author to understand the reason for the decision.

Confidential comments to the editor are welcome, but it is helpful if the main points are stated in the comments for transmission to the authors. The ideal review should answer the following questions:

- Who will be interested in reading the work, and why?
- What are the main claims of the work and how significant are they?
- Is the work likely to be one of the five most significant work(s) published in the discipline this year?
- How does the work stand out from others in its field?
- Are the claims novel? If not, which published work(s) compromise novelty?
- Are the claims convincing? If not, what further evidence is needed?
- Are there other experiments or work that would strengthen the manuscript further?
- How much would further work improve it, and how difficult would this be? Would it take a long time?
- Are the claims appropriately discussed in the context of previous literature?
- If the manuscript is unacceptable, is the study sufficiently promising to encourage the authors to resubmit?
- If the manuscript is unacceptable but promising, what specific work is needed to make it acceptable?

We appreciate that reviewers are busy, and are very grateful if they can answer the questions in the section above. However, if time is available, it is extremely helpful to the editors if reviewers can advise on some of the following points:

- Is the manuscript clearly written?
- If not, how could it be made more clear or accessible to nonspecialists?
- Would readers outside the discipline benefit from a schematic of the main result to accompany publication?
- Could the manuscript be shortened? (Because of pressure on space in our printed pages, we aim to publish manuscripts as short as is consistent with a persuasive message.)
- Should the authors be asked to provide supplementary methods or data to accompany the manuscript online? (Such data might include source code for modelling studies, detailed experimental protocols or mathematical derivations.)
- Have the authors done themselves justice without overselling their claims?
- Have they been fair in their treatment of previous literature?
- Have they provided sufficient methodological detail that the experiments could be reproduced?
- Is the statistical analysis of the data sound, and does it conform to the book/journal's guidelines?
- Are the reagents generally available?
- Are there any special ethical concerns arising from the use of human or animal subjects?

#### 4.6 Timing

AOSIS are committed to rapid editorial decisions and publication, and we believe that an efficient editorial process is a valuable service both to our authors and to the scientific community as a whole. We therefore ask reviewers to respond promptly within the number of days agreed. If reviewers anticipate a longer delay than previously expected, we ask them to let us know so that we can keep the authors informed and, where necessary, find alternatives.

Editors should aim to ensure timely peer review and publication for manuscripts they receive, especially where, to the extent that this can be predicted, findings may have important implications. Authors should be aware that priority publication is most likely for manuscripts that, as judged by the book/journal's editorial staff, may have important implications. The timing of publication may also be influenced by themed issues or if editors group submissions on a similar topic; this inevitably prevents articles from being published in the order in which they were accepted.

#### 4.7 Anonymity

We do not release reviewers' identities to authors or to other reviewers, except when reviewers specifically ask to be identified. However, unless they feel strongly, we prefer that reviewers should remain anonymous throughout the review process and beyond. Before revealing their identities, reviewers should consider the possibility that they may be asked to comment on the criticisms of

other reviewers and on further revisions of the manuscript; identified reviewers may find it more difficult to be objective in such circumstances.

We ask reviewers not to identify themselves to authors without the editor's knowledge. If they wish to reveal their identities whilst the manuscript is under consideration, this should be done via the editor or, if this is not practicable, we ask authors to inform the editor as soon as possible after the reviewer has revealed his/her identity to the author.

We deplore any attempt by authors to confront reviewers or determine their identities. Our own policy is to neither confirm nor deny any speculation about reviewers' identities, and we encourage reviewers to adopt a similar policy.

#### 4.8 Editing referees' reports

As a matter of policy, we do not suppress reviewers' reports; any comments that were intended for the authors are transmitted, regardless of what we may think of the content. On rare occasions, we may edit a report to remove offensive language or comments that reveal confidential information about other matters. We ask reviewers to avoid statements that may cause needless offence; conversely, we strongly encourage reviewers to plainly state their opinion of a manuscript. Authors should recognise that criticisms are not necessarily unfair simply because they are expressed in robust language.

#### 4.9 The peer-review system

It is editors' experience that the peer-review process is an essential part of the publication process, which improves the manuscripts we publish. Not only does peer review provide an independent assessment of the importance and technical accuracy of the results described, but the feedback from referees conveyed to authors with the editors' advice frequently also results in manuscripts being refined so that their structure and logic is more readily apparent to readers.

AOSIS is appreciative of its peer reviewers, of whom there are many tens of thousands. It is only by collaboration with our reviewers that editors can ensure that the manuscripts we publish are amongst the most important in their disciplines of scientific research. We appreciate the time that reviewers devote to assessing the manuscripts we send them, which helps to ensure that AOSIS publishes only material of the very highest quality. In particular, many submitted manuscripts contain large volumes of additional (supplementary) data and other material, which take time to evaluate. We thank our reviewers for their continued commitment to our publication process.

#### 4.10 Peer-review publication policies

All contributions submitted to AOSIS that are selected for peer review are sent to at least two independent reviewers selected by the editors. Authors are welcome to suggest suitable independent reviewers and may also request that AOSIS excludes one or two individuals or laboratories. The editor will sympathetically consider such requests and usually honours them, but the editor's decision on the choice of referees is final.



As a condition of agreeing to assess the manuscript, all reviewers undertake to keep submitted manuscripts and associated data confidential, and not to redistribute them without permission from AOSIS. If a reviewer seeks advice from colleagues whilst assessing a manuscript, he/she must ensure that confidentiality is maintained and that the names of any such colleagues are provided to AOSIS with the final report. By this and by other means, AOSIS endeavours to keep the content of all submissions confidential until the publication date. Although we make every effort to ensure that reviewers honour their promise to maintain confidentiality, we are not responsible for the conduct of reviewers.

Reviewers should be aware that it is our policy to keep their names confidential, and that we do our utmost to ensure this confidentiality. Under normal circumstances, blind peer review is protected from legislation. We cannot, however, guarantee to maintain this confidentiality in the face of a successful legal action to disclose identity in the event of a reviewer having written personally derogatory comments about the author/s in his/her reports. For this reason as well as for those of standard professional courtesy, we request reviewers to refrain from personal, negative comments about the authors of submitted manuscripts. Frank comments about the scientific content of the manuscripts, however, are strongly encouraged by the editors.

#### 4.11 Ethics and security

AOSIS's editors may seek advice about submitted manuscripts not only from technical reviewers but also on any aspect of a manuscript that raises concerns. These may include, for example, ethical issues or issues of data or materials access. Very occasionally, concerns may also relate to the implications to society of publishing a manuscript, including threats to security. In such circumstances, advice will usually be sought simultaneously with the technical peer-review process. As in all publishing decisions, the ultimate decision whether to publish is the responsibility of the editor of the book/journal concerned. Furthermore:

- Editors have a responsibility for ensuring the peer-review process is fair and should aim to minimise bias.
- Editors should apply consistent standards in their peer-review processes.

If discussions between an author, editor and peer reviewer have taken place in confidence, they should remain in confidence unless explicit consent has been given by all parties or there are exceptional circumstances.

Editors or board members will never be involved in editorial decisions about their own work.

AOSIS editors, members of editorial boards and other editorial staff (including peer reviewers; see 'Peer reviewer selection and performance') should withdraw from discussions about submissions where any circumstances might prevent them from offering unbiased editorial decisions. See 'Conflicts of interest'.

#### 4.12 Editorial independence

Editorial independence should be respected. Owners (both learned societies and universities) should not interfere with editorial decisions. Decisions by editors

about whether to publish individual items submitted to AOSIS should not be influenced by pressure from the editor's employer, the journal owner or the publisher.

#### 4.13 Peer-reviewer conduct and intellectual property

Authors are entitled to expect that peer reviewers or other individuals privy to the work of an author who submits to AOSIS will not steal their research ideas or plagiarise their work.

AOSIS's guidelines to peer reviewers are explicit about the roles and responsibilities of peer reviewers, in particular the need to treat submitted material in confidence until it has been published. Furthermore, AOSIS asks peer reviewers to destroy submitted manuscripts after they have reviewed them.

Editors should expect allegations of theft or plagiarism to be substantiated, and should treat allegations of theft or plagiarism seriously.

Editors should protect peer reviewers from authors and, even if peer reviewer identities are revealed, should discourage authors from contacting peer reviewers directly, especially if misconduct is suspected.

### 5. Ethics

AOSIS trusts our editors, who in turn trust peer reviewers to provide fair assessments, and authors trust editors to select appropriate peer reviewers, and readers put their trust in the peer-review process. Academic publishing also occurs in an environment of powerful intellectual, financial, and sometimes political, interests that may collide or compete.

#### 5.1 Ownership of ideas and expression

Our editors and readers have a right to expect that submitted work is the author's own, that it has not been plagiarised (i.e. taken from other authors without permission, if permission is required), and that copyright has not been breached (for example, if figures or tables are reproduced).

#### 5.2 Ethical obligations and responsibilities of authors

AOSIS expects authors to maintain the highest ethical standards when conducting research and in the publication process. The following principles, which are not an exhaustive list, should apply:

##### 5.2.1 Soundness and reliability

The research being reported should:

- Be conducted in an ethical and responsible manner and follow all relevant legislation.
- Be sound and carefully executed.
- Use appropriate methods of data analysis and display.

The authors should:

- Check their manuscripts carefully at all stages to ensure that methods and findings are reported accurately.

- Carefully check calculations, data presentations, typescripts/submissions and proofs.

### **5.2.2 Honesty**

Researchers should:

- Present their results honestly and without fabrication, falsification or inappropriate data manipulation.
- Present research images (e.g. micrographs, X-rays, pictures of electrophoresis gels) without them being modified in a misleading way.
- Follow applicable reporting guidelines.
- Provide sufficient detail and describe their methods clearly and unambiguously and with reference to public sources of information, in order to permit others to repeat the work and confirm the findings. Data should always be reported accurately and never be manipulated, with any problematic data also treated accordingly.
- Present reports of research that is complete. They should not omit inconvenient, inconsistent or inexplicable findings or results that do not support the authors' or sponsors' hypothesis or interpretation.
- Alert the editor promptly if they discover an error in any submitted, accepted or published work. Authors should cooperate with editors in issuing corrections or retractions when required.
- Represent the work of others accurately in citations and quotations.
- Not copy references from other publications if they have not read the cited work.
- Identify any hazards inherent in conducting the research.

Special notes:

- Researchers should not enter agreements that permit the research sponsor to veto or control the publication of the findings (unless there are exceptional circumstances, such as research classified by governments because of security implications).
- If investigations have involved animals or human subjects, authors should provide all the statements required by the book/journal in order to prove that the experimental protocols were approved appropriately and that they meet all the guidelines of the agency involved, including obtaining informed consent where required.
- Information obtained privately should not be used without the explicit permission of the individuals from whom it was obtained, and appropriate letters confirming permission to include this information must be acquired.

### **5.2.3 Balance**

Researchers should:

- Present new findings in the context of previous research. The work of others should be fairly represented. Scholarly reviews and syntheses of existing research should be complete, balanced, and should include findings regardless of whether they support the hypothesis or interpretation being proposed. Editorials or opinion pieces presenting a

single viewpoint or argument should be clearly distinguished from scholarly reviews.

- Address study limitations in their manuscript.
- Avoid criticisms of a personal nature, although well-supported criticism of a piece of work is always welcomed.

#### 5.2.4 Originality

Researchers should:

- Adhere to the accepted publication requirements, that submitted work should be original and has not been published elsewhere in any language without express citation and acknowledgement of the previously published work.
- Adhere to and follow all applicable copyright laws and conventions. Copyright material (e.g. tables, figures or extensive quotations) should be reproduced only with appropriate permission and acknowledgement.
- Properly acknowledge and reference relevant previous work and publications, both by other researchers and the authors' own. The primary literature should be cited where possible.
- Properly acknowledge data, text, figures or ideas originated by other researchers, and these should not be presented as if they were the authors' own work. Original wording taken directly from publications by other researchers should appear in quotation marks with the appropriate citations.
- Inform editors if findings have been published previously or if multiple reports or multiple analyses of a single data set are under consideration for publication elsewhere. Authors should provide copies of related publications or work submitted to other books/journals.
- Not claim originality if others have already reported similar work in part or as a whole, and credit should always be given to the work and findings of others that have led to their findings or influenced them in some way.

Special notes:

- Multiple publications arising from a single research project should be clearly identified as such and the primary publication should be referenced. Translations and adaptations for different audiences should be clearly identified as such, should acknowledge the original source, and should respect relevant copyright conventions and permission requirements. If in doubt, authors should seek permission from the original publisher before republishing any work.
- Avoid fragmenting research to maximise the number of articles submitted (also known as 'salami publishing'), and the submission of the same research to multiple books/journals or other publication media (also known as parallel publishing). Both these practices seriously undermine the innovative nature of research findings.

## 5.4 Protecting the rights of research participants/subjects, patients and experimental animals

AOSIS promotes ethical and responsible research practices.

- Authors should provide evidence that research has adhered to national standards for research practices (in human and animal studies).
- Authors should provide evidence that studies have been approved by relevant bodies, the relevant research ethics committee or institutional review board (for example, institutional review board, research ethics committee, data and safety monitoring board, regulatory authorities including those overseeing animal experiments).
- If human participants were involved, manuscripts must be accompanied by a statement that the experiments were undertaken with the understanding and appropriate informed consent of each.
- If experimental animals were used, the materials and methods (experimental procedures) section must clearly indicate that appropriate measures were taken to minimise pain or discomfort, and details of animal care should be provided.
- Editors should encourage peer reviewers to consider ethical issues raised by the research they are reviewing.
- Editors should request additional information from authors if they feel this is required.
- Editors reserve the right to reject manuscripts if there is doubt whether appropriate procedures have been followed.
- If a manuscript has been submitted from a country where there is no ethics committee, institutional review board, or similar review and approval, editors should use their own experience to judge whether the manuscripts should be published. If the decision is made to publish a manuscript under these circumstances, a short statement should be included to explain the situation.

Where individual human subjects or case studies are discussed (for example, as in medicine, psychology, criminology), books/journals should protect confidentiality and should not permit publication of items that might upset or harm participants/subjects, or breach confidentiality of, for example, the doctor-patient relationship.

- AOSIS will not publish individual information and identifiable images from patients/human subjects. We will also require explicit consent from any patients described in case studies or shown in photographs.

## 5.5 Respecting confidentiality

In the majority of cases, editors should only consider publishing information and images from individual participants/subjects or patients where the authors have obtained the individuals' explicit consent. Exceptional cases may arise where gaining the individuals' explicit consent is not possible but where publishing such information or image can be demonstrated to have a genuine public health interest. In cases like this, before taking any action, editors should seek and follow counsel from the book/journal owner, AOSIS and/or legal professionals.

In the case of technical images (for example, radiographs, micrographs), editors should ensure that all information that could identify the subject has been removed from the image.

## 5.6 Plagiarism and fabrication

Plagiarism is when an author attempts to pass off someone else's work as his or her own. Duplicate publication, sometimes called self-plagiarism, occurs when an author reuses substantial parts of his or her own published work without providing the appropriate references. This can range from having an identical manuscript published in multiple books/journals, to 'salami-slicing', where authors add small amounts of new data to a previous manuscript.

Plagiarism can be said to have clearly occurred when large chunks of text have been cut and pasted. Such manuscripts would not be considered for publication in an AOSIS book/journal. However, minor plagiarism without dishonest intent is relatively frequent, for example when an author reuses parts of an introduction from an earlier manuscript. AOSIS book/journal editors judge any case of which they become aware (either by their own knowledge of and reading about the literature, or when alerted by referees) on its own merits.

AOSIS is a member CrossCheck, an initiative to help editors verify the originality of submitted manuscripts. As part of this process, selected submitted manuscripts are scanned and compared with the CrossCheck database.

If a case of plagiarism comes to light after a manuscript is published in an AOSIS book/journal, the book/journal will conduct a preliminary investigation. If plagiarism is found, the book/journal will contact the author's institute and funding agencies. A determination of misconduct will lead the AOSIS book/journal to run a statement, bi-directionally linked online to and from the original manuscript, to note the plagiarism and to provide a reference to the plagiarised material. The manuscript containing the plagiarism will also be clearly marked on each page of the PDF.

Depending on the extent of the plagiarism, the manuscript may also be formally retracted

## 5.7 Supplements and other funded publications

In the case of books/journals which choose to publish supplements, special issues, sections, or similar materials that are funded by a third-party organisation (for example, a company, society or charity – the supporter or sometimes sponsor), the content of funded items must align with the purpose of the book/journal. They must also include:

- Explicit declaration of conflicts of interest or absence thereof for all contributions, including those of authors, editors and co-editors.
- Explicit acknowledgement of any contributions (for example, editorial assistance) made by anyone other than named authors, including their affiliations.
- Description of the processes used to select, review and edit the content, especially the differences in this process (if any) from the book/journal's normal content selection and peer-review processes.



- Details of the book/journal's affiliations and Editorial Board.

Books/journals which choose to publish supplements should appoint co-editors (including the individual who proposed the initial idea for the funded material and a second individual appointed by the book/journal) as standard procedure for all funded materials. This enables editorial decisions to be easily deputised, as should be the case when one editor is an author or is acknowledged as a contributor of a particular article, or when one editor is presented with manuscripts where their own interests may impair their ability to make an unbiased editorial decision.

A short statement explaining the process used to make editorial decisions must be included in the editorial of such an issue.

Books/journals should not permit funding organisations to make decisions beyond those about which publications they choose to fund and the extent of the funding. Decisions about the selection of authors and about the selection and editing of contents to be presented in funded publications should be made by the editor (or co-editors) of the funded publication.

AOSIS reserves the right not to publish any funded publication that does not comply with the requirements defined for the book/journal to which the manuscript or supplement has been submitted.

## **6. Preservation of published work**

AOSIS is a member of Portico which preserves our published content in the Portico archive, to ensure that our content will be secure and available into the future.

## **7. Journal title transfer**

AOSIS endorses the National Information Standards Organization Transfer Code of Practice. This means that we will use commercially reasonable efforts to ensure that any journal transfers in which we are involved are consistent with the Code.

The full code is published and available at:

[http://www.uksg.org/sites/uksg.org/files/TRANSFER\\_Code\\_of\\_Practice\\_3%20\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.uksg.org/sites/uksg.org/files/TRANSFER_Code_of_Practice_3%20_FINAL.pdf)