Cross-Cutting Themes: authorship, power relationships, scientific responsibility

**Overview questions:** What is at stake with peer review? Do you have concerns about the peer review system? Do you have experience with your own reviews, or responding to those of others? What have you appreciated about good reviews when you have received them? What can you do as a researcher to promote integrity in the peer review system?

**Process for Thinking through Difficult Ethical Dilemmas**

**Recognition***: What are the issues being raised? What is the underlying ethical concern? How does this issue impact me?*

**Reasoning***: What values are at stake? Are there competing points of view? What are the potential benefits and harms of different actions? Are there any rules or guidelines that can help?*

**Responsibility***: What are my responsibilities? Do others have responsibilities also?*

**Response***: What should I do – and why?*

**Assigned Reading:**

* Stahel PF, Moore EE. Peer review for biomedical publications: we can improve the system. *BMC medicine.* 2014; 12:179. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4177268/pdf/12916_2014_Article_179.pdf>

**Questions for discussion:**

* Stahel and Moore name several flaws in the current peer review system. What do you think are the greatest flaws that they identify? Why do you consider these the greatest flaws? What flaws are they missing?
* The authors suggest some ways to improve peer review, such as providing formal training in peer review to potential reviewers or using publication history as a way to choose the best reviewers. As a trainee or early stage researcher, what do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of these solutions? What do you think are other ways to address flaws in the peer review system?

**Additional Resources:**

* Rockwell S (2005). Ethics of Peer Review: a Guide for Manuscript Reviewers. Yale University, <http://ori.dhhs.gov/education/products/yale/prethics.pdf>
* 6 Common Flaws to Look out for in Peer Review (also includes 12 tips for critically reviewing a paper) <https://publons.com/blog/6-common-research-flaws-to-watch-out-for-in-peer-review/>

**Backpocket Case Studies:**

Cases from the HHS OHRP Educational Materials collection, contributed by Yale University. Further discussion available online at: https://ori.hhs.gov/yale-university

Case 1:

Dr. Ardito, a senior postdoc, has been asked to review a paper and receives the abstract. The paper sounds so close to his own studies that he is concerned it may be a conflict of interest for him to review it. If Dr. Ardito were to review the paper, he would put himself in a no-win situation. If he were to recommend that the journal accept the paper, he would risk of precluding publication of er own work. If he were to recommend that the journal reject the paper or that it request extensive, time-consuming revisions, this action could give the appearance of misconduct even if this recommendation was appropriate and was made with the utmost integrity. What should he do?

Case 2:

Professor Smith runs a very active, productive research laboratory with several graduate students and postdocs. She is a well regarded scientist who reviews many manuscripts and serves on study sections and other review panels. To help her trainees understand the peer review system, Dr. Smith frequently has them help to review manuscripts. Some of her postdocs have become quite skilled; their reviews need virtually no editing before Dr. Smith signs them and sends them to the journals. Dr. Smith is surprised when a colleague says that this practice is not ethical. Are there ethical issues?