

Were acknowledgements used in yester years to prevent the accusation of plagiarism in cancer cases?

Abstract

Acknowledgment is a desideratum in printed research. Elsewhere, I delved into the modern principles of it. Here, I propose to survey the trends noticeable in how the medical masters of yester years tackled it. In particular, it became evident that former efforts probably centered on preventing the accusation of plagiarism, which is defined as appropriating the already existing work of others as one's own effort.

Keywords: communication, old data, new data, acknowledgement, plagiarism, history

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Introduction

It is an admitted practice to pay homage to the source of any information being used for a new work. Elsewhere,¹ I delineated the principles as I found them in the literature. Here, on proposing to trace the patterns used by the medical masters of yester years, it materialized that they probably sought to prevent the accusation of plagiarism. This word, as the Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary² has it, is "to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own: use (another's production) without crediting the source." Also exemplified as "commit literary theft," it was stated to have been first used in 1716. Therefore, the present paper deals with sources dating thereafter.

Historical texts

By 1725, John Friend³ cited someone who was "the only physician, perhaps, who even quoted Ostaxes, one of the oldest of the Persian magi." Of interest also was Bell B,⁴ who in 1783 mentioned that "The opinion of the late Mr. Sharp on this point was singular in a man of such extensive experience." By 1793, Pearson J⁵ vouched that Richard Wiseman (was)" a surgeon whose ability and integrity reflect honour on the profession."

In contrast, Young S⁶ showed in 1805 what could happen when information was in dispute. Thus, as he put it, "The correspondence of Mr. Gay with Mr Gataker, Surgeon to the king at that time) merely teems with personal invective." This was in contrast with the opinion of Samuel Wilks⁷ who entitled his work as "Cases of enlargement of the lymphatic glands and spleen or Hodgkin's Diseases with remarks." Indeed, he admitted being "forested by Dr. Hodgkin, who was the first, as far as I am aware, to call attention to this peculiar form of disease." The same extension of the publication hand-shake was held out by George Burrows⁸ in 1844 thus: I must confess that while this case was under my observation (April 1843), I had not had the advantage of perusing an able article on cancer of the lung in the British and Foreign Medical Review, published in that same month, nor the very instructive chapter on this subject in Dr Walshe's work on Disease of the Lungs, otherwise many omissions in the history of the foregoing case would have been supplied.

One problem is the recurrent tendency to name a lesion after some big name or another! Concerning it, Samuel Fenwich⁹ was perceptive

as follows: In every way the most malignant heterologous growth, described by Burns as *spongoid haematodes*; by Hey, and afterwards by War drop, as *fungus-haematodes*; by Abernethy as *medullar sarcoma*; by Monro as fish-testicle-like (soft roe-like) tumour; by Laennec as *encénhaloide*. All these appellations serve well to designate the external characters of this new-growth.

Citation of eminent personage(s) was employed to stamp an observation authoritatively. Orr¹⁰ was in order in 1829 when some difficulty in diagnosis arose thus: But when I mention that the case was under the care of one of the greatest pathologists of the day, Dr. Craigie-that the post-mortem examination was made by the late Dr. John Reid, and by him entered in the pathological register of the Infirmary as a case of *cerebriform tumour* of the chest-and that, in stating the disease to be malignant, I have done so on the authority of the opinion of these two eminent Pathologists - in making the statement, I have said enough to set the question at rest as to the nature of the tumour.

Monro Alexander Jun, Professor of medicine, anatomy, and surgery in the University of Edinburgh, was of masterly mind.¹¹ Thus, he cited Mr. Tyler, surgeon's letter to his own father, as it "conveys a very impressive and correct idea of the nature, progress, and consequences of scirrhus of the pylorus, I have inserted it in words of the author." Similarly, Benjamin Travers¹² took the stout stand that "This disease has been so repeatedly and fully described of late years by the cultivators of Ophthalmic Surgery, that I conclude it is well known in its leading features to most members of the profession."

Certainly, it was essential to quote one's source. For example, John Mackintosh¹³ properly mentioned in 1828, exactly a century before I was born, that "This kind of affection is noticed in Professor Monro's excellent work on morbid anatomy of the gullet." Similarly, Everad Home¹⁴ noted this structure to be in Dr Baille's work and in the three stages of cancer in the Hunterian Museum. Likewise, Sims¹⁵ was satisfied that "A minute inspection of it tends to favour the views proposed by Dr. Hodgkin, in his able and philosophical paper on adventitious structure." Little wonder that Wagstaffe¹⁶ showed a Plate of microscopic examination of tumours kindly made by Dr. Creighton.

A broader acknowledgement by D'Arcy¹⁷ sounds so suitable as follows: Finally, it is a pleasure as well as a duty to express to the Laboratories Committee of the Conjoint Colleges in England my very

best thanks for the permission they have accorded me to work under their director, Dr. Sims Wood head.

Conclusion

I like the way that Sir Astley Cooper put paid to how he himself handled any accusation of possible plagiarism in his writings thus: Although the removal of the breast is the plan usually adopted, yet I will tell you a mode of treatment which I have employed with success when there has been a single cyst. I will give you two examples which will illustrate the nature of it better than anything else. I do not know that it has been described by authors, but I will not speak positively of this, God forbid that I should be obliged to read one-half or one-fourth of what is published now-a-day.

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Conflicts of interest

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