

Researchers thrash out guidelines for working with partners

Clare Dyer

BMJ

Researchers from around the world gathered in Montreal this week to try to agree a statement to ensure the integrity of scientific research in cross boundary collaborations.

The draft Montreal statement, which was keenly debated at the Third World Conference on Research Integrity taking place between 5 and 8 May, is intended to tackle the challenges arising in the growing number of collaborations across institutions and national borders.

It builds on the Singapore statement on research integrity, which set out 14 professional responsibilities for individual researchers, including reporting irresponsible research practices. That single page statement, designed to be easily posted on laboratory walls, was developed as part of the Second World Conference on Research Integrity, held in Singapore in 2010.

Tony Mayer, of Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, told the Montreal conference that 75% of publications now came from more than one institution and that 35% of papers were international.

The draft statement is intended to cover collaborations between different disciplines and sectors (such as university and industry) as well as those between institutions and across national boundaries. It requires researchers to adhere to the responsibilities in the Singapore statement as well as the extra responsibilities specific to cross boundary collaborations.

The preamble says that such collaborations presented special challenges for the responsible conduct of research “because

they may involve substantial differences in regulatory and legal systems, organisational and funding structures, research cultures, and approaches to training. It is critically important, therefore, that researchers be aware of and able to address such differences, as well as issues related to integrity that may arise in cross-boundary research collaborations.”

The draft statement sets out 20 responsibilities for individual and institutional partners, including agreeing goals and avoiding “agreements that unduly or unnecessarily restrict dissemination of data, findings, or other research products.”

Other responsibilities include openly discussing the partners’ “customary practices and assumptions related to the research” and openly dealing with a “diversity of perspectives, expertise and methods.”

Collaborative research should be “initiated and conducted for purposes that advance knowledge for the good of society,” the draft statement says. And partners should agree at the outset on how publication and other dissemination decisions would be made, including what would be published, when, and where.

The draft issued at the conference is at http://wcri2013.org/Montreal_Statement_e.shtml. An updated draft will go on the conference website later this month for further comments from conference delegates.

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2013;346:f2992

© BMJ Publishing Group Ltd 2013