Rwanda Journal
of Medicine and Health Sciences

Corrections, Retractions, Express of Concern, and Article Replacement Policy

1. Background

The **Rwanda Journal of Medicine and Health Sciences (RJMHS)** is a peer-reviewed, open-access scholarly journal published by the College of Medicine and Health Sciences, University of Rwanda. RJMHS is dedicated to publishing high-quality, impactful, and ethical scientific research in medicine, nursing, public health, pharmacy, allied health sciences, and health systems management.

Maintaining the integrity, accuracy, and reliability of the scholarly record is paramount to RJMHS. While the journal enforces rigorous pre-publication peer review, editorial screening, and plagiarism checks, post-publication updates, corrections, or retractions may occasionally be required.

This policy outlines the principles and procedures applied by RJMHS when amendments, corrections, expressions of concern, or retractions are necessary. This policy fully adheres to the guidelines and standards set forth by the **Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)**, the **International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE)**, and the **Council of Science Editors (CSE)**.

2. Scope and Responsible Parties

The implementation, enforcement, and adherence to this policy rely on the collaborative responsibilities of key stakeholders:

1. **Editors (Editor-in-Chief, Managing Editor, Deputy Editors, and Academic Editors):**
    - Responsible for evaluating reports of errors, misconduct, or scientific invalidity.
    - Lead investigations in consultation with editorial board members or external advisors/institutional committees.
    - Render final decisions on appropriate post-publication actions (Correction, Retraction, or Expression of Concern) and ensure standard formatting and metadata linking across indexed platforms (e.g., PubMed Central, SCOPUS, DOAJ, AJOL).

2. **Editorial Board:**
    - Serves as an advisory body during complex allegations of research misconduct or data manipulation.
    - Assists in independent reviews and ensures editorial neutrality and adherence to international publication ethics standards.
3. **Authors:**
    - Obligated to immediately notify the RJMHS editorial office upon discovering significant errors, inaccuracies, or data discrepancies in their published work.
    - Required to cooperate fully with editorial investigations, providing original data, laboratory notebooks, or clarifications when requested.
4. **Peer Reviewers:**
    - Encouraged to alert the Editorial Office if they identify post-publication issues or uncredited overlapping content in published articles they review elsewhere or inspect in the scientific record.
5. **Publishing Institution & Academic Leadership (UR-CMHS & Directorate of Research and Innovation):**
    - Provides institutional oversight, ensuring legal compliance and supporting editorial independence during formal investigations of research integrity.
6. **Readers and External Whistleblowers:**
    - May submit substantiated concerns regarding error, plagiarism, figure manipulation, or ethics violations for editorial review.

3. Post-Publication Modifications and Actions

RJMHS recognizes four formal mechanisms for addressing post-publication updates:

3.1. Erratum / Corrigendum (Corrections)

A Correction notice is published to correct errors that affect the scientific accuracy, understanding, or metadata of a published article, but do not invalidate the overall findings and conclusions.

- **Erratum:** Corrects significant errors introduced by the journal during editing, typesetting, or production.
- **Corrigendum:** Corrects significant errors introduced by the author(s) during data collection, analysis, or manuscript preparation (e.g., missed affiliations, minor table/figure errors, misstated parameters).
- **Policy Rules for Corrections:**
    - Minor errors (such as typographical or spelling errors that do not alter scientific meaning) will not be corrected via formal notice.
    - The original article remains online with a permanent reference notice linking to the Correction.
    - A formal Correction Notice is published in the next available issue, explicitly detailing the exact changes made, with a direct bidirectional link to the original article.

3.2. Retractions

In accordance with COPE Retraction Guidelines, a Retraction is reserved for cases where the findings or conclusions of a published article are fundamentally unreliable, dishonest, or unethical.

- **Criteria for Retraction:**
  - Clear evidence that findings are unreliable due to major error, data falsification, or fabrication.
  - Unattributed plagiarism or substantial self-plagiarism exceeding allowable similarity standards.
  - Duplicate publication without proper acknowledgment or permission.
  - Failure to obtain required ethics approval or patient informed consent.
  - Unreported major conflicts of interest that severely impact study validity.
- **Retraction Process:**
  - **Retraction Notice:** A separate notice titled *"Retraction: [Article Title]"* is published in the journal and indexed in online databases. The notice states who is retracting the paper and clearly explains the rationale for retraction.
  - **Article Status:** The original article PDF remains accessible on the web platform to maintain historical record, but it is clearly watermarked with **"RETRACTED"** across every page. The HTML version is updated to reflect the retracted status.

3.3. Expression of Concern

An **Expression of Concern** is a formal notice published by the Editor-in-Chief when:

- There is inconclusive or ongoing evidence of research or publication misconduct, but the investigation is protracted or non-conclusive.
- An institutional investigation is underway, but a definitive decision will not be reached for a prolonged period.
- Unreliable or disputed findings are brought to light, but insufficient evidence exists to justify an immediate retraction.

Once the investigation reaches a conclusion, the Expression of Concern will be superseded by a formal Correction, Retraction, or a clarifying note confirming the integrity of the article.

3.4. Article Removal / Replacement

- **Removal:** In extremely rare circumstances, an article may be entirely removed from the online platform. Removal is restricted to cases involving:
  - Court orders or severe legal mandates.
  - Content that poses immediate, grave medical or safety risks.
  - Defamatory material or severe privacy violations.*(A metadata statement will remain indicating the article has been removed for legal or health safety reasons)*.
- **Replacement:** If an article contains errors that render it completely inaccurate, but the authors promptly correct the flaws using identical datasets and peer-reviewed re-

evaluation, the original work may be replaced with a revised version accompanied by a clear change history notice (subject to Editor-in-Chief approval).

4. Investigation Procedure & Handling Misconduct

1. **Reporting Concerns:** Concerns regarding any published RJMHS article should be submitted in writing to the Editor-in-Chief (rjmhseditor@gmail.com), including supporting evidence or data comparisons.
2. **Initial Assessment:** The Editor-in-Chief and Managing Editor conduct a preliminary review to determine if the report is substantiated and within scope.
3. **Author Contact & Explanation:** The corresponding author is formally contacted and provided with an opportunity to respond and present original raw data within 14–21 business days.
4. **Editorial Committee Review:** If disputes persist or evidence points toward misconduct, an ad hoc Research Integrity Panel (comprising Editors, Editorial Board members, and independent subject experts) evaluates the case.
5. **Institutional Escalation:** Where allegations involve serious scientific misconduct (data fabrication, theft, unethical human subject trials), RJMHS may contact the authors' home institution, ethics committee, or funding body for further investigation.
6. **Final Resolution:** The Editor-in-Chief holds final decision-making authority on whether to issue a Correction, Retraction, Expression of Concern, or dismiss the report.

5. Archiving, Metadata, and Indexing Compliance

To ensure transparency across global academic indexing databases (e.g., PubMed Central, SCOPUS, DOAJ, AJOL, Crossref):

- All notices (Corrections, Retractions, Expressions of Concern) receive a unique Digital Object Identifier (DOI).
- Bidirectional hyperlinking between the original article and the formal notice is implemented immediately upon publication.
- Metadata XML feeds sent to indexing aggregators are updated promptly to reflect changes in article status.

References

1. **Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).** *COPE Retraction Guidelines* (Version 3). Committee on Publication Ethics. 2025). https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.1.4
2. **International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE).** *Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals*. International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. 2026. https://www.icmje.org/icmje-recommendations.pdf

3. **Council of Science Editors (CSE) Editorial Policy Committee.** *CSE's Recommendations for Promoting Integrity in Scientific Journal Publications*. Council of Science Editors. 2023. https://www.councilscienceeditors.org/recommendations-for-promoting-integrity-in-scientific-journal-publications
4. Jack L Jr. Complete Republication: Recent Updates to CSE Recommendations for Promoting Integrity in Scientific Journal Publications: 7 Ways to Integrate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Into Scholarly Publishing. Prev Chronic Dis. 2023 Mar 23;20:E17. doi: 10.5888/pcd20.230051.