

## **Publication Ethics Statement**

SPH DARWIN journals are members of the Committee on Publication Ethics ([COPE](#)). We fully adhere to its [Code of Conduct](#) and to its [Best Practice Guidelines](#).

The editors of SPH DARWIN journals enforce a rigorous peer-review process together with strict ethical policies and standards to ensure the addition of high-quality scientific studies to the field of scholarly publication. In cases where we become aware of ethical issues, we are committed to investigating and taking necessary action to maintain the integrity of the literature and ensure the safety of research participants.

## **Ethical Guidelines for Authors**

### **Summary**

Authors wishing to publish their papers in SPH DARWIN journals must abide to the following:

- Authors should accurately present their research findings and include an objective discussion of the significance of their findings.
- All and only those who qualify for authorship should be included as authors, and their contribution given in the manuscript.
- Any facts that might be perceived as a possible conflict of interest of the author(s) must be disclosed in the paper prior to submission.
- Data and methods used in the research need to be presented in sufficient detail in the paper so that other researchers can replicate the work. Raw data must be made publicly available unless there is a compelling reason otherwise (e.g., patient confidentiality).
- Simultaneous submission of manuscripts to more than one journal is not permitted.
- Original research results must be novel and not previously published, including being previously published in another language.
- For any content previously published (including quotations, figures or tables), any necessary permission to publish must be obtained from the copyright holder.
- Errors and inaccuracies found after publication must be promptly communicated to the Editorial Office.

This list is not exhaustive, and authors should be aware of local regulations and accepted norms within academic publishing.

### **Authorship**

SPH DARWIN follows the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors ( [ICMJE](#)) guidelines which state that in order to qualify for authorship of a manuscript, authors must satisfy the following:

- Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; and
- Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; and
- Final approval of the version to be published; and
- Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

Those who contributed to the work but do not qualify for authorship should be listed in the acknowledgments. More detailed guidance on authorship is given by the [International Council of Medical Journal Editors \(ICMJE\)](#).

Any change to the author list during the editorial process or after publication should be approved by all authors, including any who have been removed. We reserve the right to request evidence of authorship, and changes to authorship after acceptance will be made at the discretion of SPH DARWIN.

### *Author Contributions*

For complete transparency, all submitted manuscripts should include an author contributorship statement that specifies the work of each author. For research articles with several authors, a short paragraph specifying their individual contributions must be provided.

The following statements should be used: Conceptualization, X.X. and Y.Y.; methodology, X.X.; software, X.X.; validation, X.X., Y.Y. and Z.Z.; formal analysis, X.X.; investigation, X.X.; resources, X.X.; data curation, X.X.; writing—original draft preparation, X.X.; writing—review and editing, X.X.; visualization, X.X.; supervision, X.X.; project administration, X.X.; funding acquisition, Y.Y. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Please refer to [CRediT taxonomy](#) for an explanation of terms. Authorship must be limited to those who have contributed substantially to the work reported.

The corresponding author should act as a point of contact between the editor and the other authors, keep co-authors informed, and involve them in major decisions about the publication.

Joint first authors can be indicated by the inclusion of the statement “X and X contributed equally to this paper” in the manuscript. The roles of the equal authors should also be adequately disclosed in the contributorship statement.

For review articles, where individual statements are less applicable, a statement should be included that clarifies who was responsible for the ideation, who performed the literature search and/or data analysis, and who drafted and revised the work.

For articles that are principally based a student’s dissertation or thesis, SPH DARWIN recommends that the student is listed as principal author.

### *Consortium/Group Authorship*

If authorship is retained by the consortium or group, the consortium or group should be listed as an author. Individual consortium/group author members listed in the author byline must qualify for authorship according to [ICMJE](#) guidelines.

Where work is presented by the author(s) on behalf of a consortium or group, this should be clarified in the author list, for example “Author A on behalf of XXX Consortium/Group”. The consortium/group will not retain authorship and will only appear in the author list.

If provided, the consortium/group members will be listed in a separate section at the end of the article in Acknowledgments, Appendix or Supplementary Materials.

### *Deceased Authors*

If a manuscript is submitted with a deceased author included in the authorship, or if an author passes away during peer review, the corresponding author, or co-authors, should inform the editorial office. If the deceased author was a corresponding author, the authorship group should nominate a co-author for this role. The corresponding author should confirm the contribution of the deceased author and any potential conflicts of interest. Upon publication, a note will be added under the author list.

### *Changes to Authorship*

Authors are expected to carefully consider authorship before manuscript submission. Any change to the author list should be made during the editorial process, before manuscript acceptance. Authorship changes, including any addition, removal, or rearrangement of author names will require the approval of all authors including any to be removed. To request any change in authorship, the journal must receive a completed authorship change form that includes the signatures of all authors, and provides a reason for the change. Any changes to authorship requested after manuscript acceptance will result in a delay in publication. If the manuscript has already been published, requests for a change in authorship will be evaluated and require the publication of a *Correction*. We reserve the right to request evidence of authorship, and changes to authorship after acceptance will be made at the discretion of SPH DARWIN.

## **Plagiarism, Data Fabrication and Image Manipulation**

**Plagiarism is not acceptable in SPH DARWIN journals.** Plagiarism includes copying text, ideas, images, or data from another source, even from your own publications, without giving credit to the original source.

Reuse of text that is copied from another source must be between quotation marks and the original source must be cited. If a study’s design or the manuscript’s structure or language has been inspired by previous studies, these studies must be explicitly cited.

All SPH DARWIN submissions are checked for plagiarism using the industry standard software Thenticate. If plagiarism is detected during the peer review process, the manuscript may be rejected. If plagiarism is detected after publication, an investigation will take place and action taken in accordance with our policies.

**Image files must not be manipulated or adjusted in any way** that could lead to misinterpretation of the information provided by the original image. Irregular manipulation includes 1) introduction, enhancement, moving, or removing features from the original image, 2) grouping of images that should obviously be presented separately (e.g., from different parts of the same gel, or from different gels), or 3) modifying the contrast, brightness or color balance to obscure, eliminate or enhance some information.

If irregular image manipulation is identified and confirmed during the peer review process, we may reject the manuscript. If irregular image manipulation is identified and confirmed after publication, we may correct or retract the paper.

Data presented must be original and not inappropriately selected, manipulated, enhanced, or fabricated. This includes 1) exclusion of data points to enhance significance of conclusions, 2) fabrication of data, 3) selection of results that support a particular conclusion at the expense of contradictory data, 4) deliberate selection of analysis tools or methods to support a particular conclusion (including p-hacking). We strongly recommend preregistration of methods and analysis.

## **Research Involving Human Subjects**

When reporting on research that involves human subjects, human material, human tissues, or human data, authors must declare that the investigations were carried out following the rules of the Declaration of Helsinki of 1975 (<https://www.wma.net/what-we-do/medical-ethics/declaration-of-helsinki/>), revised in 2013. According to point 23 of this declaration, an approval from the local institutional review board (IRB) or other appropriate ethics committee must be obtained before undertaking the research to confirm the study meets national and international guidelines. As a minimum, a statement including the project identification code, date of approval, and name of the ethics committee or institutional review board must be stated in Section 'Institutional Review Board Statement' of the article.

Example of an ethical statement: "All subjects gave their informed consent for inclusion before they participated in the study. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and the protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of XXX (Project identification code)."

For non-interventional studies (e.g. surveys, questionnaires, social media research), all participants must be fully informed if the anonymity is assured, why the research is being conducted, how their data will be used and if there are any risks associated. As with all research involving humans, ethical approval from an appropriate ethics committee must be obtained prior to conducting the study. If ethical approval is not required, authors must either provide an exemption from the ethics committee or are encouraged to cite the local or national legislation that indicates ethics approval is not required for this type of study. Where a study has been granted exemption, the name of the ethics committee which provided this should be stated in

Section ‘Institutional Review Board Statement’ with a full explanation regarding why ethical approval was not required.

A written informed consent for publication must be obtained from participating patients. Data relating to individual participants must be described in detail, but private information identifying participants need not be included unless the identifiable materials are of relevance to the research (for example, photographs of participants’ faces that show a particular symptom). Patients’ initials or other personal identifiers must not appear in any images. For manuscripts that include any case details, personal information, and/or images of patients, authors must obtain signed informed consent for publication from patients (or their relatives/guardians) before submitting to an SPH DARWIN journal.

You may refer to our sample form and provide an appropriate form after consulting with your affiliated institution. For the purposes of publishing in SPH DARWIN journals, a consent, permission, or release form should include unlimited permission for publication in all formats (including print, electronic, and online), in sublicensed and reprinted versions (including translations and derived works), and in other works and products under open access license. To respect patients’ and any other individual’s privacy, please do not send signed forms. The journal reserves the right to ask authors to provide signed forms if necessary.

If the study reports research involving vulnerable groups, an additional check may be performed. The submitted manuscript will be scrutinized by the editorial office and upon request, documentary evidence (blank consent forms and any related discussion documents from the ethics board) must be supplied. Additionally, when studies describe groups by race, ethnicity, gender, disability, disease, etc., explanation regarding why such categorization was needed must be clearly stated in the article.

### **Ethical Guidelines for the Use of Animals in Research**

The editors will require that the benefits potentially derived from any research causing harm to animals are significant in relation to any cost endured by animals, and that procedures followed are unlikely to cause offense to the majority of readers. Authors should particularly ensure that their research complies with the commonly-accepted ‘3Rs’ [1]:

- Replacement of animals by alternatives wherever possible,
- Reduction in number of animals used, and
- Refinement of experimental conditions and procedures to minimize the harm to animals.

Authors must include details on housing, husbandry and pain management in their manuscript.

For further guidance authors should refer to the Code of Practice for the Housing and Care of Animals Used in Scientific Procedures [2], American Association for Laboratory Animal Science [3] or European Animal Research Association [4].

If national legislation requires it, studies involving vertebrates or higher invertebrates must only be carried out after obtaining approval from the appropriate ethics committee. As a minimum, the project identification code, date of approval and name of the ethics committee or institutional review board should be stated in Section ‘Institutional Review Board Statement’.

Research procedures must be carried out in accordance with national and institutional regulations. Statements on animal welfare should confirm that the study complied with all relevant legislation. Clinical studies involving animals and interventions outside of routine care require ethics committee oversight as per the American Veterinary Medical Association. If the study involved client-owned animals, informed client consent must be obtained and certified in the manuscript report of the research. Owners must be fully informed if there are any risks associated with the procedures and that the research will be published. If available, a high standard of veterinary care must be provided. Authors are responsible for correctness of the statements provided in the manuscript.

If ethical approval is not required by national laws, authors must provide an exemption from the ethics committee, if one is available. Where a study has been granted exemption, the name of the ethics committee that provided this should be stated in Section 'Institutional Review Board Statement' with a full explanation on why the ethical approval was not required.

If no animal ethics committee is available to review applications, authors should be aware that the ethics of their research will be evaluated by reviewers and editors. Authors should provide a statement justifying the work from an ethical perspective, using the same utilitarian framework that is used by ethics committees. Authors may be asked to provide this even if they have received ethical approval.

SPH DARWIN endorses the ARRIVE guidelines ([arriveguidelines.org/](http://arriveguidelines.org/)) for reporting experiments using live animals. Authors and reviewers must use the ARRIVE guidelines as a checklist, which can be found at  <https://arriveguidelines.org/sites/arrive/files/documents/ARRIVE%20Compliance%20Questionnaire.pdf>. Editors reserve the right to ask for the checklist and to reject submissions that do not adhere to these guidelines, to reject submissions based on ethical or animal welfare concerns or if the procedure described does not appear to be justified by the value of the work presented.

1. NSW Department of Primary Industries and Animal Research Review Panel. Three Rs. Available online: <https://www.animaethics.org.au/three-rs>
2. Home Office. Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. Code of Practice for the Housing and Care of Animals Bred, Supplied or Used for Scientific Purposes. Available online:  [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/388535/CoPanimalsWeb.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/388535/CoPanimalsWeb.pdf)
3. American Association for Laboratory Animal Science. The Scientific Basis for Regulation of Animal Care and Use. Available online: <https://www.aalas.org/about-aalas/position-papers/scientific-basis-for-regulation-of-animal-care-and-use>
4. European Animal Research Association. EU regulations on animal research. Available online: <https://www.eara.eu/animal-research-law>

## Research Involving Cell Lines

Methods sections for submissions reporting on research with cell lines should state the origin of any cell lines. For established cell lines, the provenance should be stated and references must also be given to either a published paper or to a commercial source. If previously unpublished *de novo* cell lines were used, including those gifted from another laboratory, details of

institutional review board or ethics committee approval must be given, and confirmation of written informed consent must be provided if the line is of human origin. Editors reserve the rights to reject any submission that does not meet these requirements.

An example of an ethical statement:

The HCT116 cell line was obtained from XXXX. The MLH1+ cell line was provided by XXXXX, Ltd. The DLD-1 cell line was obtained from Dr. XXXX. The DR-GFP and SA-GFP reporter plasmids were obtained from Dr. XXX and the Rad51K133A expression vector was obtained from Dr. XXXX.

### **Research Involving Plants**

Experimental research on plants (either cultivated or wild) including collection of plant material, must comply with institutional, national, or international guidelines. We recommend that authors comply with the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) and the [Convention on the Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora](#).

For each submitted manuscript supporting genetic information and origin must be provided. For research manuscripts involving rare and non-model plants (other than, e.g., *Arabidopsis thaliana*, *Nicotiana benthamiana*, *Oriza sativa*, or many other typical model plants), voucher specimens must be deposited in an accessible herbarium or museum. Vouchers may be requested for review by future investigators to verify the identity of the material used in the study (especially if taxonomic rearrangements occur in the future). They should include details of the populations sampled on the site of collection (GPS coordinates), date of collection, and document the part(s) used in the study where appropriate. For rare, threatened or endangered species this can be waived but it is necessary for the author to describe this in the cover letter.

Editors reserve the rights to reject any submission that does not meet these requirements.

An example of Ethical Statements:

*Torenia fournieri* plants were used in this study. White-flowered Crown White (CrW) and violet-flowered Crown Violet (CrV) cultivars selected from 'Crown Mix' (XXX Company, City, Country) were kindly provided by Dr. XXX (XXX Institute, City, Country).

*Arabidopsis* mutant lines (SALKxxxx, SAILxxxx,...) were kindly provided by Dr. XXX , institute, city, country).

### **Clinical Trials Registration**

#### *Registration*

SPH DARWIN follows the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) [guidelines](#)  which require and recommend registration of clinical trials in a public trials registry at or before the time of first patient enrollment as a condition of consideration for publication.

Purely observational studies do not require registration. A clinical trial not only refers to studies that take place in a hospital or involve pharmaceuticals, but also refer to all studies which involve participant randomization and group classification in the context of the intervention under assessment.

Authors are strongly encouraged to pre-register clinical trials with an international clinical trials register and cite a reference to the registration in the Methods section. Suitable databases include [clinicaltrials.gov](http://clinicaltrials.gov), [the EU Clinical Trials Register](http://theEUClinicalTrialsRegister.eu) and those listed by the World Health Organisation [International Clinical Trials Registry Platform](http://InternationalClinicalTrialsRegistryPlatform.org).

Approval to conduct a study from an independent local, regional, or national review body is not equivalent to prospective clinical trial registration. SPH DARWIN reserves the right to decline any paper without trial registration for further peer-review. However, if the study protocol has been published before the enrolment, the registration can be waived with correct citation of the published protocol.

### **Sex and Gender in Research**

We encourage our authors to follow the [‘Sex and Gender Equity in Research – SAGER – guidelines’](#) and to include sex and gender considerations where relevant. Authors should use the terms sex (biological attribute) and gender (shaped by social and cultural circumstances) carefully in order to avoid confusing both terms. Article titles and/or abstracts should indicate clearly what sex(es) the study applies to. Authors should also describe in the background, whether sex and/or gender differences may be expected; report how sex and/or gender were accounted for in the design of the study; provide disaggregated data by sex and/or gender, where appropriate; and discuss respective results. If a sex and/or gender analysis was not conducted, the rationale should be given in the Discussion. We suggest that our authors consult the full [guidelines](#) before submission.

### **Borders and Territories**

Potential disputes over borders and territories may have particular relevance for authors in describing their research or in an author or editor correspondence address, and should be respected. Content decisions are an editorial matter and where there is a potential or perceived dispute or complaint, the editorial team will attempt to find a resolution that satisfies parties involved.

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Once you have obtained permission, the copyright holder may give you instructions on the form of acknowledgement to be followed. Alternatively, we recommend following the style: "Reproduced with permission from [author], [book/journal title]; published by [publisher], [year]".

## **Translations**

SPH DARWIN journals may choose to publish high-quality content that has been previously published in a different language. In order for a manuscript containing translated content to be considered for publication, authors must ensure that:

- All authors from the original publication also appear on the submitted manuscript;

- Appropriate permission is sought and granted from the publisher, copyright holders, and/or authors of the original article prior to manuscript submission;
- Relevant documentation relating to these permissions is uploaded in the supplementary material section during submission;
- The journal editor is informed about the publishing history of the previously published content;
- The original article is referenced in the acknowledgement section using the below template.

This is a translation/reprint of (insert title here) originally published in (insert language) by (insert publisher) (insert journal name, year, issue/volume number, page numbers). This translation was prepared by (insert name) with support from (insert name of funding source, if any). Permission was granted by (insert publisher, copyright holder, and/or authors name).

Any translated articles that do not follow the above guidelines are unacceptable.

## Patents

SPH DARWIN journals provide fast, rigorous peer review and rapid publication following acceptance. Accepted articles are immediately available online, and published on an ongoing basis regardless of their issue's date of release. Publication, peer review and editorial procedures, proofreading and copyediting, and any other processes will not be postponed for pending issues relating to patent applications or intellectual property. Authors are responsible for ensuring that all patent applications and intellectual property issues are resolved prior to publication. Any patent applications or registrations should be declared in accordance with SPH DARWIN's Conflicts of Interest Policy.

## Conflict of Interests

According to the [International Committee of Medical Journal Editors](#), "Authors should avoid entering into agreements with study sponsors, both for-profit and non-profit, that interfere with authors' access to all of the study's data or that interfere with their ability to analyze and interpret the data and to prepare and publish manuscripts independently when and where they choose".

Authors must identify and declare any personal circumstances or interest that may be perceived as inappropriately influencing the representation or interpretation of the reported research results. Examples of potential conflicts of interest include but are not limited to financial interests (such as membership, employment, consultancies, stocks/shares ownership, honoraria, grants or other funding, paid expert testimonies and patent-licensing arrangements) and non-financial interests (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, personal beliefs).

Any role of the funding sponsors in the design of the study, in the collection, analyses or interpretation of data, in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results must be declared in this section. If there is no role, please state, "The funding sponsors had no

role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, and in the decision to publish the results”.

Authors can disclose potential conflicts of interest via the online submission system during the submission process. Declarations regarding conflicts of interest can also be collected via the SPH DARWIN disclosure form: (**Attachment 1**).

## **Attachment 1**

The corresponding author must include a summary statement in the manuscript in a separate section “Conflicts of Interest” placed just before the reference list. The statement should reflect all the collected potential conflict of interest disclosures in the form.

See below for examples of disclosures:

Conflicts of Interest: Author A has received research grants from Company A. Author B has received a speaker honorarium from Company X and owns stocks in Company Y. Author C has been involved as a consultant and expert witness in Company Z. Author D is the inventor of patent X.

SPH DARWIN acknowledges the importance of publishing research regarding smoking cessation or reduction in tobacco use. While we accept submissions on these topics, SPH DARWIN does not publish studies funded partially or fully by the tobacco industry. Other privately funded studies—for example, those associated with the pharmaceutical or food industries—must clearly state the role of the funder. This statement should cover aspects related to how the study topic was selected, experimental design, and collection and analysis of data.

## **Citation Policies**

Authors should ensure that where material is taken from other sources (including their own published writing), the source is clearly cited and that where appropriate permission is obtained.

Authors should not engage in excessive self-citation of their own work.

Authors should not copy references from other publications if they have not read the cited work.

Authors should not preferentially cite their own or their friends’, peers’, or institution’s publications.

Authors should not cite advertisements or advertorial material.

In accordance with COPE guidelines, we expect that “original wording taken directly from publications by other researchers should appear in quotation marks with the appropriate citations”. This condition also applies to an author’s own work. COPE have produced a discussion document on  [citation manipulation](#) with recommendations for best practice.

## **SPH DARWIN Research Data Policies**

SPH DARWIN is committed to supporting open scientific exchange and enabling our authors to achieve best practices in sharing and archiving research data. We encourage all authors of articles published in SPH DARWIN journals to share their research data. Individual journal guidelines can be found at the journal 'Instructions for Authors' page. Data sharing policies concern the minimal dataset that supports the central findings of a published study. Generated data should be publicly available and cited in accordance with journal guidelines.

SPH DARWIN data policies are informed by [TOP Guidelines](#).

Where ethical, legal or privacy issues are present, data should not be shared. The authors should make any limitations clear in the Data Availability Statement upon submission. Authors should ensure that data shared are in accordance with consent provided by participants on the use of confidential data.

Data Availability Statements provide details regarding where data supporting reported results can be found, including links to publicly archived datasets analyzed or generated during the study.

Below are suggested Data Availability Statements:

- Data available in a publicly accessible repository that does not issue DOIs Publicly available datasets were analyzed in this study. This data can be found here: [link/accession number].
- Data available on request due to restrictions eg privacy or ethical The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to [insert reason here].
- 3rd Party Data Restrictions apply to the availability of these data. Data was obtained from [third party] and are available [from the authors/at URL] with the permission of [third party].
- Data sharing not applicable No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.
- Data is contained within the article or supplementary material The data presented in this study are available in [insert article or supplementary material here].

Data citation:

- [dataset] Authors. Year. Dataset title; Data repository or archive; Version (if any); Persistent identifier (e.g., DOI).

## **Ethical Guidelines for Reviewers**

### **Potential Conflict of Interests**

We ask reviewers to inform the journal editor if they hold a conflict of interests that may prejudice the review report, either in a positive or negative way. The Editorial Office will check as far as possible before invitation; however, we appreciate the cooperation of reviewers in this matter. Reviewers who are invited to assess a manuscript they previously reviewed for another journal should not consider this as a conflict of interest in itself.

### **Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Reviewers must keep the content of the manuscript, including the abstract, confidential. They must inform the Editorial Office if they would like a student or colleague to complete the review on their behalf.

SPH DARWIN journals operate single or double-blind peer review. Reviewers should be careful not to reveal their identity to the authors, either in their comments or in metadata for reports submitted in Microsoft Word and PDF format.

SPH DARWIN journals offer authors the possibility to publish review reports with their paper and for reviewers to sign their open review reports but will not reveal reviewer name until publication and only with their explicit agreement.

### **Ethical Guidelines for Academic Editors**

Along with the Editorial Office, Editors-in-Chief, Editorial Board Members, and Guest Editors take responsibility for overseeing the integrity of SPH DARWIN's editorial process. The following provides details on specific ethical aspects of their role.

If the academic editor has ethical concerns about a manuscript sent for review or decision, or receives information about a possible ethical breach after publication, they must contact the Editorial Office as soon as possible. Our Editorial Office will then conduct an investigation according to  [COPE guidelines](#).

To support academic editors, checks are made by Managing Editors and Assistant Editors. However, editors should still report any concerns on any aspect. Checks include

1. Ethic approval and permissions for research involving human subjects, animals or cell lines.
2. Plagiarism, duplicate publication, and that necessary permission from the copyright holder to include already-published figures or images.
3. An international clinical trial register for pre-register clinical trials or and to cite a reference to the registration in the Methods Section.
4. Author background and qualification.

When making a final acceptance decision on a manuscript, academic editors should consider the following:

1. Any facts that might be perceived as a possible conflict of interest of the author(s) must be disclosed in the paper prior to submission.
2. Authors must accurately present their research findings and include an objective discussion of the significance of their findings.
3. Data and methods used in the research need to be presented in sufficient detail in the paper, so that other researchers can replicate the work.

## **Comments and Complaints**

Readers who have concerns or complaints about published papers should first contact the corresponding author to attempt a resolution directly, before contacting the Editorial Office.

The Editorial Office may be contacted in cases where it is not appropriate to contact the authors, if the authors were not responsive, or if the concerns were not resolved. The Editorial Office will coordinate with the complainant, author/s and Editors-in-Chief or Editorial Board members for the investigation, remedy or resolution of any concerns or complaints.

Complaints, comments, or update requests relating to scholarly validity, ethical or legal aspects of either the paper or its review process will be investigated further where appropriate. All complaints, comments or update requests relating to published papers are investigated by the Editorial Office with the support of the Editorial Board and final approval by the Editor-in-Chief. For ethical concerns, final decisions are made by the Editor-in-Chief or Editorial Board members who are supported by the Editorial Office to promote adherence to core principles of publication ethics as expressed by the [Committee on Publication Ethics](#). Other persons and institutions will be consulted as necessary, including university authorities, or experts in the field. Legal counsel may be sought where the complaint has legal implications.

Personal comments or criticisms will not be entertained. All complaints are investigated, including anonymous complaints. Complainants may request that the Editorial Office handle their complaint confidentially and the Editorial Office, any Editors-in-Chief or other Editorial Board members will attempt to do so insofar as is appropriate and in accordance with our internal procedures.

Decisions about *Corrections*, *Comments and Replies*, *Expressions of Concerns*, or *Retractions* resulting from an investigation are made by Editors-in-Chief, Section Editor-in-Chief or Editorial Board members, and communicated to authors. All updates are required to follow our policy on Updating Published Papers (**Attachment 2**).

### **Attachment 2**

If a complaint is not considered to be substantiated, then further communication will only be considered if additional information evidencing concerns is presented.

Complainants might not be updated about the status of an investigation until a final decision has been reached, however complainants will be notified if an update is published. The Editorial Office and Editorial Board members are under no obligation to present further detail.

Communication will be ended where it is not considered cordial or respectful. Readers with complaints or concerns should be aware that investigations take time to conduct.

When raising concerns to the Editorial Office, please use the address e-mail ([ibpg-darwin@wp.pl](mailto:ibpg-darwin@wp.pl)) or contact details below, and, in addition to details about the paper, please also include details of the complaint, its scholarly, scientific or academic validity, a summary of the main points and any other issues, details of any correspondence already had with the authors and a statement clarifying any actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest.

## **Updating Published Papers**

MDPI recognizes our responsibility to correct scientifically relevant errors, or ethical issues that have been brought to our attention. To offer transparency regarding any changes for our authors and readers, we have the following standardized criteria in place for updates to any of our published papers.

### ***Minor errors***

Minor errors that do not affect readability or meaning (e.g., spelling, grammatical, spacing errors) do not qualify for an update, regardless of when or by whom the error was introduced.

### ***Metadata errors***

Requests to correct errors in a paper's metadata (e.g., title, author name, abstract) can be completed, if deemed by the Editorial Office to be a reasonable request. Once approved, the paper will be updated and re-published on our website. Following this, all relevant indexing databases will be notified to ensure that the database versions have also been revised.

### ***Corrections***

Requests to correct errors in the following cases can be completed, but must also include the publication of a *Correction* notice:

- Errors that could affect the scientific interpretation. For example:
  - error in a misleading section of an otherwise reliable publication
  - error in data or interpretation (that does not affect final conclusions)
- Scientifically relevant formatting changes. For example:
  - missing or unclear figures/tables
- Addition or removal of an author from authorship list (including addition or removal of entire affiliations)
- Addition or removal of an entire reference
- Addition or removal of a significant amount of text within the back matter. For example:

- funding, author contributions, acknowledgements

Once the update request has been approved, the paper will be updated and re-published on our website, along with the publication of a *Correction*. This notice is a separate publication that links to the updated paper, but is published in the most current Issue of the journal. The *Correction* serves the purpose to notify all readers that a significant change has occurred to the paper, and that the revised version is now available on the website. Following these updates, all relevant indexing databases will be notified to ensure that the database versions have also been revised.

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Some authors might wish to change their name following publication. In such cases, SPH DARWIN will update and republish the article and re-deliver the updated metadata to the appropriate indexing databases (please note that all updates are dependent upon the policies of the databases). Our teams are aware that name changes can be sensitive and/or private in nature, for a variety of reasons that may include alignment with gender identity, marriage, divorce, or religious conversion. Therefore, to protect author identity, a *Correction* will not be published and co-authors will not be notified. Authors should contact the journal's Editorial Office with their name change request.

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Sometimes a paper needs to be retracted from the body of research literature. This could be due to inadvertent errors made during the research process, gross ethical breaches, fabrication of data, large amounts of plagiarism, or other reasons. Such articles threaten the integrity of scientific records and need to be retracted.

SPH DARWIN follows the recommendations of the  [Committee on Publication Ethics \(COPE\) for retraction](#).

If a *Retraction* is published, the original publication is amended with a “RETRACTED” watermark, but will still be available on the journal's website for future reference. However, retracted articles should not be cited and used for further research, as they cannot be relied upon. *Retractions* are published using the same authorship and affiliation as the paper being retracted, so that the notice and the original retracted paper can be properly found by readers within indexing databases. The *Retraction* notice will also be published in the current Issue of the journal. *Partial Retractions* might be published in cases where results are only partially wrong.

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For complex, inconclusive, or prolonged situations, an *Expression of Concern* may be published. If investigations into alleged or suspected research misconduct have not yet been completed or prove to be inconclusive, an editor or journal may wish to publish an *Expression of Concern*, detailing the points of concern and what actions, if any, are in progress.

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Once a Comment is approved for further peer review, the Editorial Office will then approach the authors of the paper in question and invite them to prepare a Reply to this Comment. The Reply allows the authors to publicly respond to the concerns pointed out by the reader. If the reader's complaints are substantiated, and the authors are not able to adequately respond to the concerns, a Correction of the original paper may be published, or the paper can be retracted entirely. If authors do not provide a response by the deadline provided, or decide not to respond, the Comment may be published alongside a note that explains the absence of the Reply.

Both Comments and Replies will be reviewed to ensure that:

- the Comment addresses significant aspects of the original paper without becoming essentially a new paper;
- the Reply responds directly to any concerns, without becoming evasive;
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