

Attitude of Romanian medicine students towards plagiarism

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Dear Editor,

As far as research in the field of medicine is concerned, this plays an important part in the management of patients and policy making, and, therefore, medical research should be performed as correct and accurate as possible, also involving a publishing outcome free of any traces of misconduct. As in many other fields of research, *plagiarism* is also an ardent issue within medical research activity, consisting of misappropriating other's published resources or discoveries without any reference to one's personal effort [1]. Although there still are controversies over it, self-plagiarism may also be considered an act of scientific misconduct of one's own work. In the last decade, more and more medicine students are involved in research, either in the form of a research project within specialized courses or as a scientific article to be presented at student international conferences or published in prestigious medical journals. The question arising here is whether medicine students are familiarized or not with issues of scientific misconduct, such as *plagiarism* or *self-plagiarism*.

A study was performed between March 1st and April 30th 2013, including 150 1st year medicine students within the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova. They were asked to complete anonymous questionnaires regarding plagiarism. At the end, there were collected 140 questionnaires (RR=94%).

The questionnaire used was the Romanian translation of the *ATP Questionnaire (Attitude Towards Plagiarism)* developed by Mavrinac M *et al.* in 2010 [2]. While the original questionnaire contained 29 questions, the Romanian translated questionnaire used contained only 25 questions covering three main factors, namely: 12 questions on Factor I – positive attitude toward plagiarism, 7 questions on Factor II – negative attitude toward plagiarism and 10 questions on Factor III – subjective norms toward plagiarism. The answers were represented as a scale from 1 to 5: 1 (strongly agree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree). Age and gender were also taken into consideration. The statistical analyses were performed by using IBM SPSS Software version 20.0 (Statistics Standard, SPSS Inc., Chicago, USA). The results were presented as the mean \pm SDs and frequencies. For continuous variables there was used the Student's *t*-test and the Pearson *chi*-square test (with Fisher's exact test for categorical variables).

Out of the total number of 150 participant medical students in the study, 103 were women and 47 men. As far as their age was concerned, the mean age was of 20 years (± 1 year). After analyzing the answers to the anonymous questionnaires, the average total number of correct answers was 9.7 ± 5.3 . The average number of false answers was 2.1 ± 0.3 , while the average number of neutral answers was 2.3 ± 0.2 . In all three categories, the answers did not differ significantly between male and female participants. The detailed results of the questionnaire answers are shown in Figure 1.

The present study highlighted the fact that the general attitude of medical students within the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova was more a positive one as far as plagiarism is concerned, which is rather disturbing, taking into consideration the importance of having a good scientific conduct nowadays.

An important study on plagiarism with similar results was the one performed by Ghajarzadeh M *et al.* in 2012 [3], showing a great prevalence of less correct answers to a negative attitude towards plagiarism questions among Iranian medical faculty members.

In order to try to prevent future attempts of plagiarizing among medical students as future researchers within the medical science field, there should be insisted upon the aspects of plagiarism and its implications within specialized courses about the quality of research. Our belief is that exposing medical students to genuine quality research papers, as well as to the rules and methodologies of good research, could only lead to an effective result in decreasing plagiarism. This should be kept in mind, as present medical students will be tomorrow's researchers in medicine, either by embracing a scientific career, or as future MD-Title Candidates, striving for completing a genuine MD Thesis.

Some viable solutions for diminishing this positive attitude toward plagiarism among medical students could be: (a) introducing much more information about the aspects of plagiarism and, also, clear warning and punishment for all levels of plagiarism; and (b) use of plagiarism detecting softwares in all academic institutions. Taking at least these measures will prevent the spread of plagiarism, which could become an "illness" within the area of academic medical research and education [4].

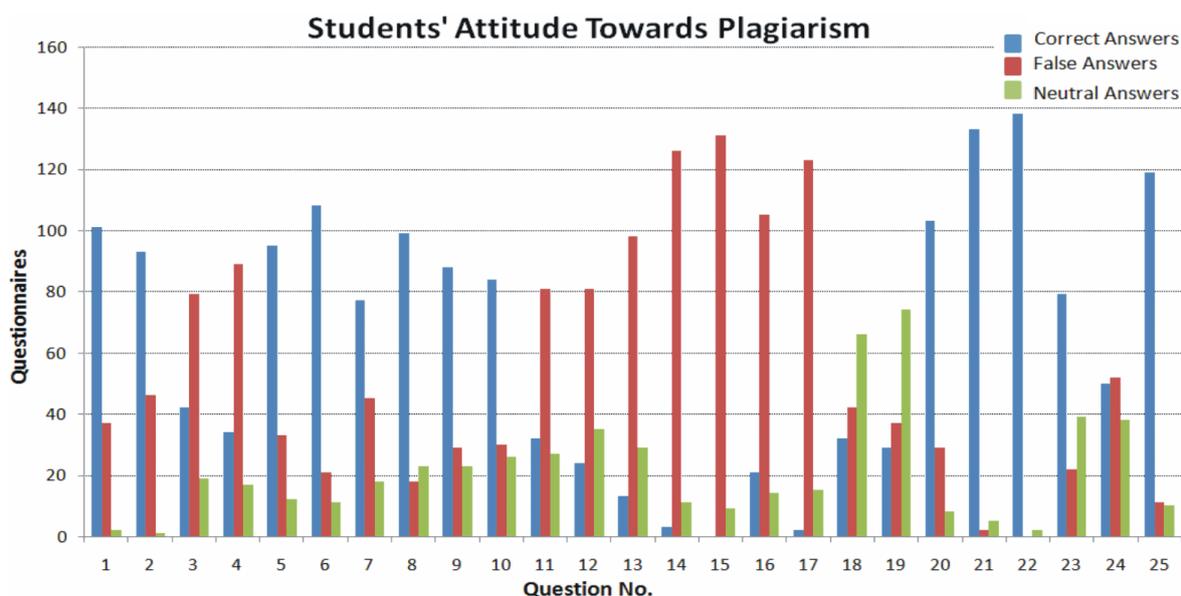


Figure 1 – Frequency of correct, false and neutral answers to questions regarding the students' attitude towards plagiarism.

Research has always been a herald of future progress in all fields of activity, including medicine. Consequently, medical research has greatly evolved in the past decades both at international and national levels. Our study revealed that the general attitude of medical students within the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova was a positive one towards the idea of plagiarism, which should be a warning both for the national authorities responsible for academic curricula and for medicine academic teachers, who should be the first in trying to inspire medicine students with quality research concepts, both through personal guidance and by their own academic example within medical research.

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