

Gaceta Sanitaria ETHICAL GUIDELINES¹

Table of contents

0. Summary
1. Introduction
2. Ethics and study design
3. Authorship and acknowledgements
4. Conflicts of interest
5. Peer review
6. Editorial decisions and appeals
7. *Gaceta Sanitaria's* relationship with its parent organisation (SESPAS) and publisher (Elsevier España)

0. Summary

Gaceta Sanitaria is an active advocate of transparency and rigour in its relationships with its parent organisation (SESPAS), its publisher (Elsevier España), and its authors, reviewers and readers. **Gaceta Sanitaria's** aim is to select scientific data of immediate or future relevance for public health practice using a peer review process that focuses exclusively on the scientific quality and usefulness of articles, without discrimination based on the geographical origin, professional status, academic rank or sex of the authors. **Gaceta Sanitaria** is committed to furthering democracy and human rights, promoting the health of minority groups and reducing social inequalities.

The editorial process must be objective, non-biased, thorough and fair, applying ethical principles to the decisions made. This Ethical Guidelines document sets out the journal's policy to ensure ethical and equal treatment of all individuals involved in the publication process. It describes the journal's position on study design, authorship and acknowledgements, conflicts of interest, the review process, the establishment of a new **Gaceta Sanitaria** ombudsman, how to combat scientific misconduct and the relationships between the journal, SESPAS and Elsevier España, including its funding arrangements.

1. Introduction

Gaceta Sanitaria is an active advocate of transparency and rigour in its relationships with its parent organisation (SESPAS), its publisher (Elsevier España), and its authors, reviewers and readers. It is therefore a member of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE, www.publicationethics.org) and adheres to the Editorial Policy Statements of 21 March 2006 approved by the Council of Science Editors. These are available at <http://www.councilscienceeditors.org>.

This Ethical Guidelines document sets out the journal's policy to ensure ethical and equal treatment of all individuals involved in the publication process. These guidelines have been written and discussed by the **Gaceta Sanitaria** Editorial Board and shared with the Board of Directors of SESPAS and Elsevier España. Similar guidelines have already been written by other journals (e.g. *American Journal of Public Health*²) and Elsevier has also adopted them³. These guidelines have been made public so that they can be consulted by all interested parties.

¹ Based on the guidelines of the *American Journal of Public Health*, themselves based on the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) Publication Ethics Policies for Medical Journals (<http://www.wame.org/resources/publication-ethics-policies-for-medical-journals>, accessed 11/07/2011), and written by the **Gaceta Sanitaria** Editorial Board (particularly Carlos Álvarez-Dardet, Alberto Ruano and Carmen Vives) in collaboration with Esteve Fernández, Ana García and Jordi Delclós.

² <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/misc/AJPHethicsPolicyFinal110307.pdf>, accessed 14/7/2011.

³ http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/intro.cws_home/ethical_guidelines, accessed 14/7/2011.

Gaceta Sanitaria's aim is to select scientific data of immediate or future relevance for public health practice using a peer review process that focuses exclusively on the scientific quality and usefulness of articles, without discrimination based on the geographical origin, professional status, academic rank or sex of the authors. Scientific journals also play an important role in putting issues on the social agenda and proposing or criticising healthcare policies in order to improve society's wellbeing. Scientific journals are generally prestigious, influential publications, amongst both the general public and healthcare sector professionals, and they should therefore include high-quality contents that allow that influence to be maintained and widened. **Gaceta Sanitaria** is committed to furthering democracy and human rights, promoting the health of minority groups and decreasing social inequalities. The editorial process must be objective, non-biased, thorough and fair, applying ethical principles to the decisions made. **Gaceta Sanitaria's** reputation depends on the trust of its readers, authors, reviewers and editors, as well as healthcare professionals, the community, advertisers, funding agencies and healthcare authorities. That trust can be strengthened by describing, as explicitly as possible, the journal's review policies, which aim to ensure ethical, equal treatment of all individuals involved in the publication process. **Gaceta Sanitaria** believes that the external validity of results and the implications of findings for policies are of great relevance, and encourages its authors to discuss these matters in their papers.

2. Ethics and study design

The studies that **Gaceta Sanitaria** considers for publication have been conducted applying the highest quality control standards in both their execution and data analysis, in accordance with the ethical guidelines that apply to public health research.

Authors should keep any data gathered during the studies submitted for publication because reviewers and editors may request a re-analysis or even the original database in order to carry out any pertinent checks. Biased studies, falsification of data or selective inclusion of results constitutes scientific misconduct, to which **Gaceta Sanitaria** is firmly opposed. Any cases of scientific misconduct detected will be reported to the authorities with jurisdiction over the authors involved, and the Editorial Board may even decide to publish all the available information about the case in the journal.

Gaceta Sanitaria adheres to the basic principles of the World Medical Association's Declaration of Helsinki (<http://www.wma.net/es/30publications/10policies/b3/>). All research studies in animals or humans submitted to **Gaceta Sanitaria** must have been approved by the corresponding research committees. The authors must state this in their manuscript. In some cases the editors may require documentary evidence of this approval.

3. Authorship and acknowledgements

Authorship basically means a significant intellectual contribution to an article. For all manuscripts submitted, the corresponding author must specify the contributions made by each of the named authors. **Gaceta Sanitaria** is committed to fighting authorship fraud, i.e. 'guest' authors (people who do not meet the authorship criteria but who are named as authors) or 'ghost' authors (people who meet the authorship criteria but who are not named as authors). Authors are invited to consult the journal's Guidelines for Authors.

Gaceta Sanitaria will particularly monitor compliance with authorship criteria where manuscripts have more than six authors. It is more difficult to ensure that manuscripts with seven or more authors comply with the authorship criteria proposed by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. In recent years, there have been a large number of multi-centre studies where many of the authors from each study site have merely helped to recruit subjects and therefore do not fulfil internationally recognised authorship criteria. **Gaceta Sanitaria** will use a rigorous approach to ensure that such manuscripts comply with authorship criteria, but that does not mean that papers with more than six authors will not be published if they genuinely do meet requirements. The acknowledgements section should be used to give credit to the people who do not meet all the authorship requirements but contributed in some way to the study execution or drafting of the manuscript. This section can also be used to name individuals or institutions that have supported the study or the manuscript either through work or with funding.

The acknowledgements section should not include the names of anyone who has not agreed to their inclusion. **Gaceta Sanitaria** adheres to the international guidelines on authorship and acknowledgements of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (<http://www.icmje.org/#author>).

All authors are accountable for the accuracy of the information included in the manuscript, and one author should act as guarantor, accepting full responsibility for the work.

4. Conflicts of interest

Conflicts of interest include situations that, if readers or individuals involved in the publication process become aware of them, may make them feel sceptical, mistrustful or defensive. This means situations or circumstances that may influence the judgement and integrity of the authors, reviewers and members of the Editorial Board, and could therefore affect the credibility of a scientific article. A potential conflict of interest exists even if the individuals involved believe that such circumstances have not affected their judgement or integrity, and conflicts of interest should therefore always be declared.

There are various types of conflict of interest: employment-related (editor or reviewer working at the study site); research-related (having a similar project nearing completion, close collaboration or rivalries between authors); financial (stock ownership or options, funding of studies by commercial entities, receipt of payment for consulting work, speeches or membership of boards of directors); and moral (religious beliefs regarding abortion, sexuality or end of life).

Gaceta Sanitaria is a staunch advocate of the declaration of conflicts of interest. It assesses potential conflicts of interest affecting three groups involved in the **Gaceta Sanitaria** editorial process: authors, members of the Editorial Board, and reviewers.

Conflicts of interest of Gaceta Sanitaria authors

All manuscripts submitted to **Gaceta Sanitaria** must be accompanied by a declaration of the conflicts of interest of all named authors. When authors submit the manuscript they should declare any such conflicts of interest in writing. The editors may require the authors to elaborate on these conflicts of interest if deemed necessary. If there are no conflicts of interest, authors must explicitly state that no such conflicts exist. **Gaceta Sanitaria** complies with the guidelines of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, in which conflicts of interest extend to the authors' family members and the people they live with.

Conflicts of interest of Gaceta Sanitaria editors

Gaceta Sanitaria wants to achieve maximum transparency in the editorial process, and has therefore set out a series of specific criteria to deal with potential conflicts of interest amongst its editors. Editors will not be tasked with editing manuscripts written by authors who work at the same institution or organisation as the editors, are relatives of the editors or have previously had a professional relationship with the editors. Furthermore, editors will not be tasked with editing articles with which they have any other type of conflict of interest. The journal's management team will monitor this aspect carefully.

One conflict of interest that could affect **Gaceta Sanitaria's** editors is that it may be easier for them to have their articles published in the journal because their manuscripts will be edited by fellow members of the Editorial Board. This could lead to bias in the review process. Although this might make it seem inappropriate for editors to submit manuscripts to **Gaceta Sanitaria**, it could also be considered unfair to prevent them from submitting their research to the journal. If editors submit manuscripts and they are accepted after the peer review and editorial process, it should be clearly stated that one or more named authors is/are members of the **Gaceta Sanitaria** editorial team (this should already be included in the manuscript at the time it is submitted to the journal). During the editorial process, author-editors will not be able to access any information about the manuscript's status (assigned editor, assigned reviewers) via the editorial management program, and the tools incorporated into that program will be used to ensure this is the case.

Conflicts of interest of Gaceta Sanitaria reviewers

Gaceta Sanitaria's reviewers must also declare any conflicts of interest related to manuscripts assigned to them for review. They will not be tasked with reviewing manuscripts with which they have a conflict of interest.

5. Peer review

Peer review is a fundamental part of the scientific publication process. A manuscript that is undergoing the review process constitutes privileged information that should be treated as confidential. It should not be saved, copied or shared with colleagues without the explicit permission of the **management team**. Reviewers and editors must not make personal or professional use of the manuscripts. Interpretations or criticisms of the manuscripts should be kept private, unless the reviewer is commissioned to write an editorial or commentary to accompany the article when it is published in **Gaceta Sanitaria**.

Gaceta Sanitaria encourages all authors submitting manuscripts to put forward names of other professionals they believe could adequately review their study, as well as the names of potential reviewers they do not think should review their manuscript, specifying their reasons for that belief. **Gaceta Sanitaria's** editorial policy is to have at least two external reviewers and one Editorial Board member assigned to each article, thus ensuring greater diversity of opinion.

6. Editorial decisions and appeals

The decision whether or not to publish an article should be based exclusively on its importance, originality, clarity, relevance to public health and methodological quality. Studies with negative results, or which contradict what is generally accepted by the literature, should receive the same treatment.

Unjustified criticism of individuals or institutions in manuscripts could damage **Gaceta Sanitaria's** image and result in editors requesting that changes be made or even lead to the manuscript being rejected.

Authors who submit manuscripts to **Gaceta Sanitaria** are entitled to appeal any decision made by the editors by submitting an appeal letter detailing justifiable reasons why the editors should reconsider their decision (mistakes made by or clear bias of editors or reviewers), not simply voicing their disagreement with the decision. If they wish to lodge a formal appeal, any of the authors can file a complaint with **Gaceta Sanitaria's** ombudsman.

Gaceta Sanitaria Ombudsman

To reinforce the mechanisms that ensure transparency and good conduct in the journal's processes, **Gaceta Sanitaria** has created the role of **Gaceta Sanitaria** ombudsman. Such initiatives are already quite widespread, with similar figures in various organisations and media, including the scientific press. The first such figure was appointed by *The Lancet* in 1996, tasked with investigating authors' claims and complaints regarding the editorial processing of their works. The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of the word *ombudsman* is 'an official appointed to investigate individuals' complaints against a company or organisation, especially a public authority'.

Gaceta Sanitaria has extended the ombudsman's role to cover all individuals involved in the editorial process (authors, reviewers, editors, editorial management), as well as the public and other parties affected by the journal's content (e.g. people or groups who may believe that they are unfairly treated in the texts published). Anyone who wishes to can contact the ombudsman in writing outlining their complaint.

The **Gaceta Sanitaria** ombudsman will have consultative power, not executive power. He or she can be contacted directly in all cases, without any mediation by the editorial team or any other party. The ombudsman will also be able to consult all documentation relevant to each case (correspondence, reports, etc.). The ombudsman's functions and contact details will be provided in the journal. Furthermore, the principles and outcomes of the ombudsman's activity will be reported on periodically.

in the editorial comments section of the journal. The confidentiality and privacy of each case will be respected in all such reports.

The **Gaceta Sanitaria** Editorial Board will put forward a candidate for ombudsman and make public the selection process used. The ombudsman will then be appointed by SESPAS. To ensure that the ombudsman is able to fulfil his or her functions, activities and duties, these must be fully guaranteed completely independently of SESPAS and of **Gaceta Sanitaria's** editorial bodies.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is scientific misconduct that consists of using the published or unpublished ideas of others without permission and without attributing authorship or citing the original work, presenting the work as new and original, not derived from another source. Plagiarism aims to deceive readers who, if the plagiarist is successful, accept the plagiarist as the author of the work. Self-plagiarism consists of using parts of works already published by the same author, without citing those existing works. If **Gaceta Sanitaria** editors detect plagiarism or self-plagiarism, they will reject the article in question. If the plagiarism is detected after publication, the journal's **management** will inform all interested parties and publish a retraction, assisting with any inquiry if one were to be launched.

Response to cases of scientific misconduct

Gaceta Sanitaria publicly opposes scientific misconduct and is prepared to take action to tackle it. To do this, it relies upon the collaboration of its authors and readers. Depending on the seriousness of each case, **Gaceta Sanitaria** will take action on a sliding scale ranging from sending a written warning to the authors involved, to reporting the legally responsible individuals at the institution where the authors under investigation work, and finally to publishing a public retraction of the article, providing all the relevant details in an editorial comment. This last action will require the support of the entire Editorial Board, while the first two can be taken by the journal's **management team**. The steps taken by the Editorial Board when authors are suspected of scientific misconduct will be based on the guidelines of the United States Office of Research Integrity (*Analysis of Institutional Policies for Responding to Allegations of Scientific Misconduct*, available at: http://ori.hhs.gov/documents/institutional_policies.pdf, accessed 11/07/2011) as there is no equivalent body in Spain or in Europe, and the recently created Comité de Ética en la Investigación has not yet published any recommendations.

Acts of potential misconduct may be deliberate or may be the result of ignorance or negligence. Cases will only be considered misconduct if there is documentary evidence of deliberate acts, bad faith or attempts to deceive readers of **Gaceta Sanitaria**, including:

- a. Falsification of data
- b. Plagiarism
- c. Inappropriate authorship
- d. Manipulation in data analysis
- e. Inappropriate or biased acts by reviewer or editor
- f. Violation of Spanish research regulations

7. Gaceta Sanitaria's relationship with its parent organisation (SESPAS) and publisher (Elsevier España)

Gaceta Sanitaria's relationship with its parent organisation SESPAS and its publisher Elsevier España are governed by the *Reglamento para Gaceta Sanitaria* approved by the SESPAS Assembly on 17 June 2009. The **Gaceta Sanitaria management team** is responsible for the quality and relevance of the journal's contents and for compliance with editorial development policies established by SESPAS, including those related to its line of business, and should periodically provide an account of the results of its management activities to SESPAS.

Although SESPAS is **Gaceta Sanitaria's** parent organisation, the journal's **management** and editorial teams will work independently of it and its governing bodies to establish the journal's editorial policy, i.e. its content. This does not mean that there will be no collaboration between **Gaceta Sanitaria's** editorial and **management** teams and SESPAS' Assembly and Board of Directors. In particular, there

should be collaboration in the suggestion of topics on which the journal **management team** should commission editorials and special articles, and for supplements on topics that SESPAS considers to be priority ones for public health and health policy. The **management** and editorial team will send a written report to SESPAS each year detailing the number of manuscripts received, accepted and published, by section and topic, as well as **Gaceta Sanitaria's** financial and bibliometric position.

Elsevier España is responsible for all aspects related to publication, including the editorial staff, budget, business policy and the tools used for the journal's editorial management, such as the manuscript management program. Elsevier España will help to ensure that the journal is included in various databases and bibliographic repertories and will maintain the systems required for manuscripts to be submitted, reviewed and published online.

Gaceta Sanitaria is financed by the subscription fees of SESPAS members, public sector institution subscriptions and advertising by pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical companies. Supplements are financed by the conferences that publish their abstracts, and some have been sponsored by pharmaceutical companies or the public sector. **Gaceta Sanitaria's** sources of funding and the contributions they make will be published each year.