

What to do if you suspect redundant (duplicate) publication

(a) Suspected redundant publication in a submitted manuscript

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Thank reviewer and say you plan to investigate. Get full documentary evidence if not already provided

Check extent and nature of overlap/redundancy

Major overlap/redundancy (i.e. based on same data with identical or very similar findings and/or evidence that authors have sought to hide redundancy e.g. by changing title or author order or not citing previous papers)

Contact corresponding author in writing, ideally enclosing signed authorship statement (or cover letter) stating that submitted work has not been published elsewhere and documentary evidence of duplication

Author responds

Unsatisfactory explanation/admission of fault

Write to author (all authors if possible) rejecting submission, explaining position and expected future behaviour

Consider informing author's superior and/or person responsible for research governance

No response

Attempt to contact all other authors (check Medline/Google for emails)

No response

Write to author (all authors if possible), explaining position and expected future behavior

Inform author(s) of your action

Minor overlap with some element of redundancy or legitimate overlap (e.g. methods) or re-analysis (e.g. sub-group/extended follow-up/discussion aimed at different audience)

Contact author in neutral terms/expressing concern/explaining journal's position
Explain that secondary papers must refer to original Request missing reference to original and/or remove overlapping material
Proceed with review/decision

Inform reviewer of outcome/action

Contact author's institution requesting your concern is passed to author's superior and/or person responsible for research governance
Try to obtain acknowledgement of your letter

If no response, keep contacting institution every 3-6 months

Inform reviewer of outcome/action

No significant overlap

Inform reviewers of decision and proceed with review

Notes

- The instructions to authors should state the journal's policy on redundant publication.
- It may be helpful to request the institution's policy.
- Ask authors to verify that their manuscript is original and has not been published elsewhere.
- International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) advises that translations are acceptable but MUST reference the original.

Further reading

COPE Cases on redundant/duplicate publication: [http://publicationethics.org/cases/?f\[0\]=im_field_classifications%3A829](http://publicationethics.org/cases/?f[0]=im_field_classifications%3A829)

Duplicate publication guidelines www.biomedcentral.com/about/duplicatepublication (nb. the definitions only apply to BMC and may not be accepted by other publishers).

Links to other sites are provided for your convenience but COPE accepts no responsibility or liability for the content of those sites

Version one

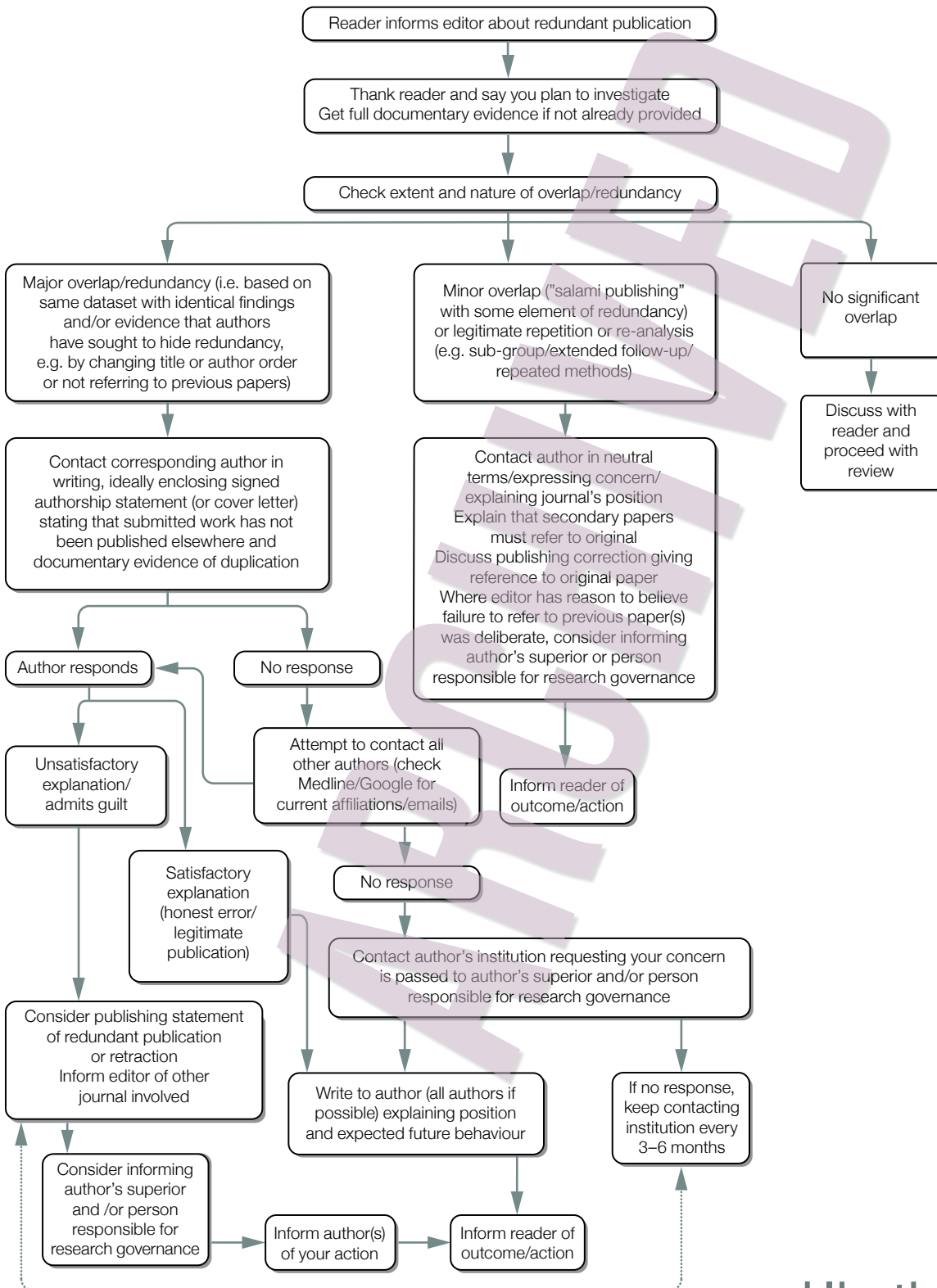
Published 2006
<http://bit.ly/2fmf6g0>

Current version

November 2015

What to do if you suspect redundant (duplicate) publication

(b) Suspected redundant publication in a published manuscript



Notes

- The instructions to authors should state the journal's policy on redundant publication.
- Asking authors to sign a statement or tick a box may be helpful in subsequent investigations.
- ICMJE advises that translations are acceptable but MUST reference the original. Editors may consider publishing a correction (i.e. the link to the original article) rather than a retraction/notice of duplicate publication in such cases.

Version one

Published 2006
<http://bit.ly/2fCptzz>

Current version

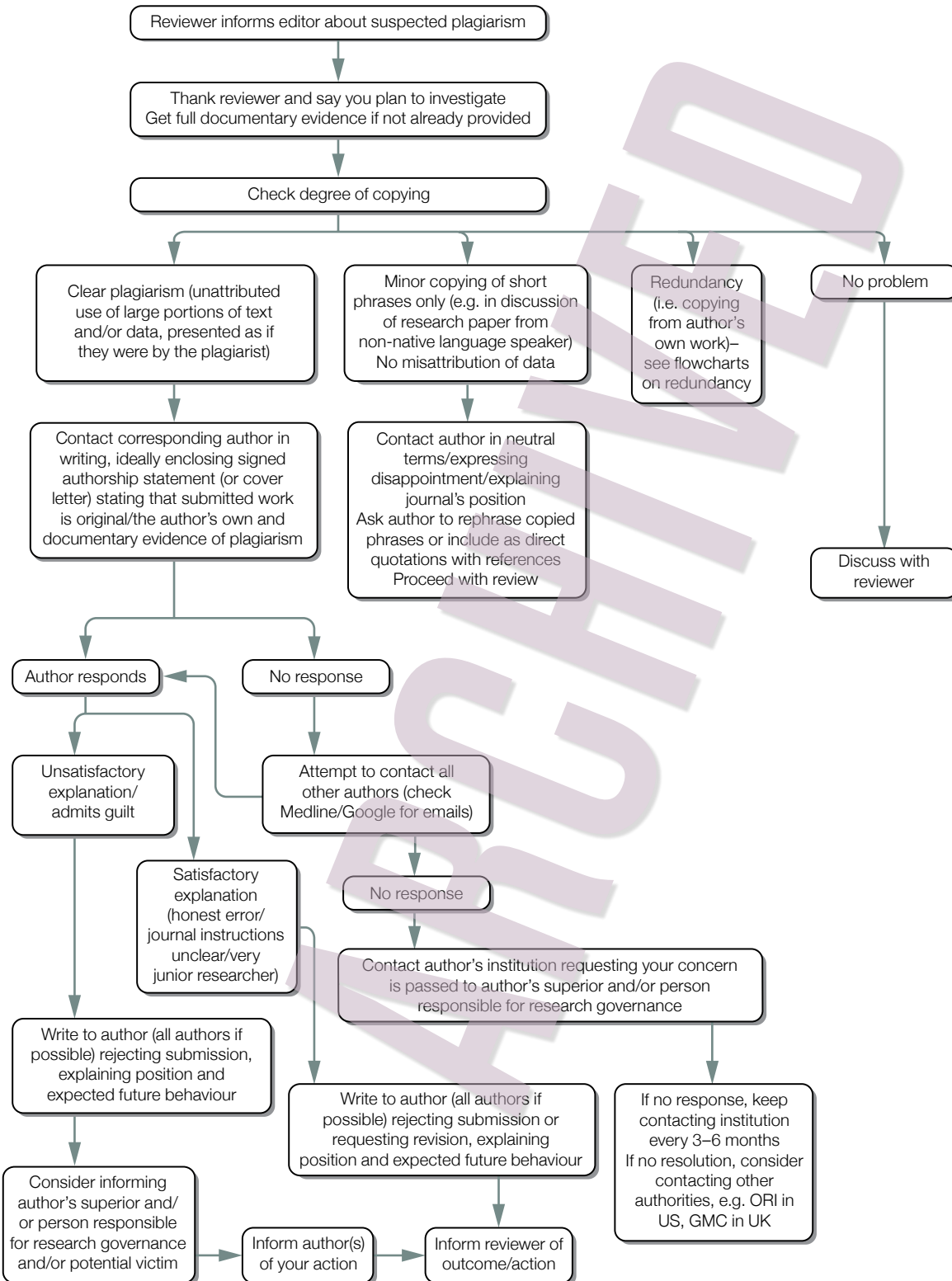
November 2015

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What to do if you suspect plagiarism

(a) Suspected plagiarism in a submitted manuscript



Note
The instructions to authors should include a definition of plagiarism and state the journal's policy on it

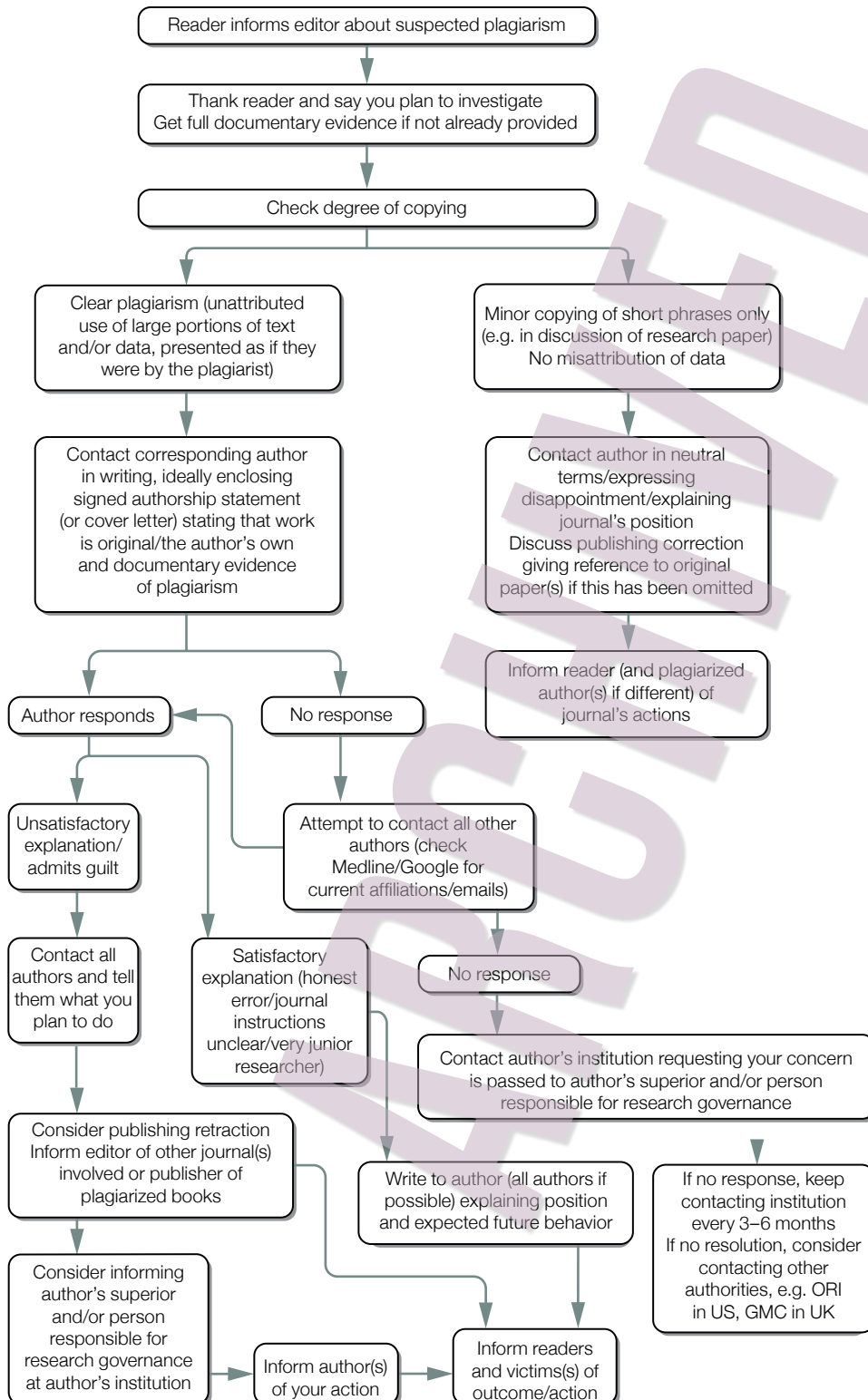
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What to do if you suspect plagiarism

(b) Suspected plagiarism in a published manuscript

Note
The instructions to authors should include a definition of plagiarism and state the journal's policy on it

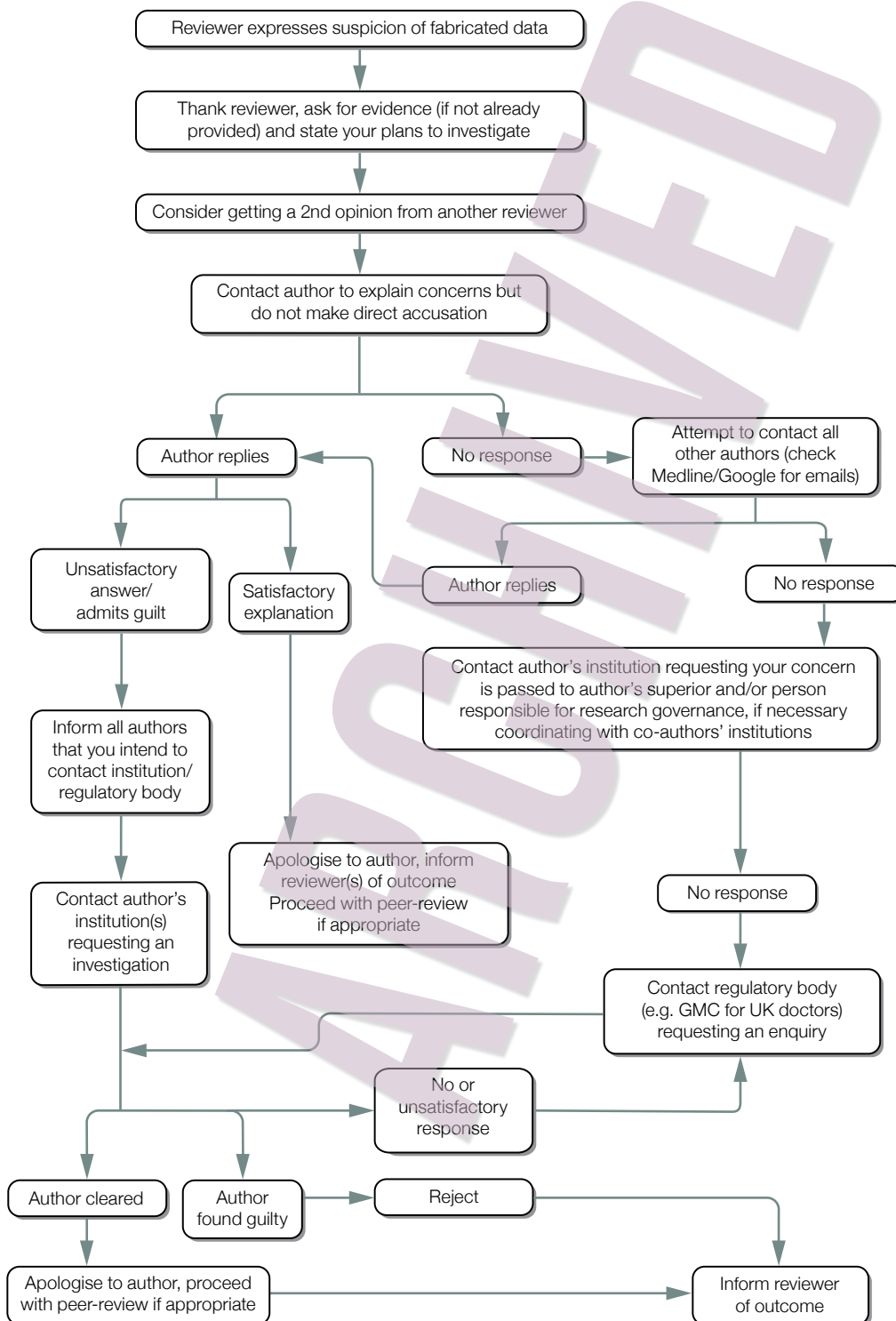


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What to do if you suspect fabricated data

(a) Suspected fabricated data in a submitted manuscript

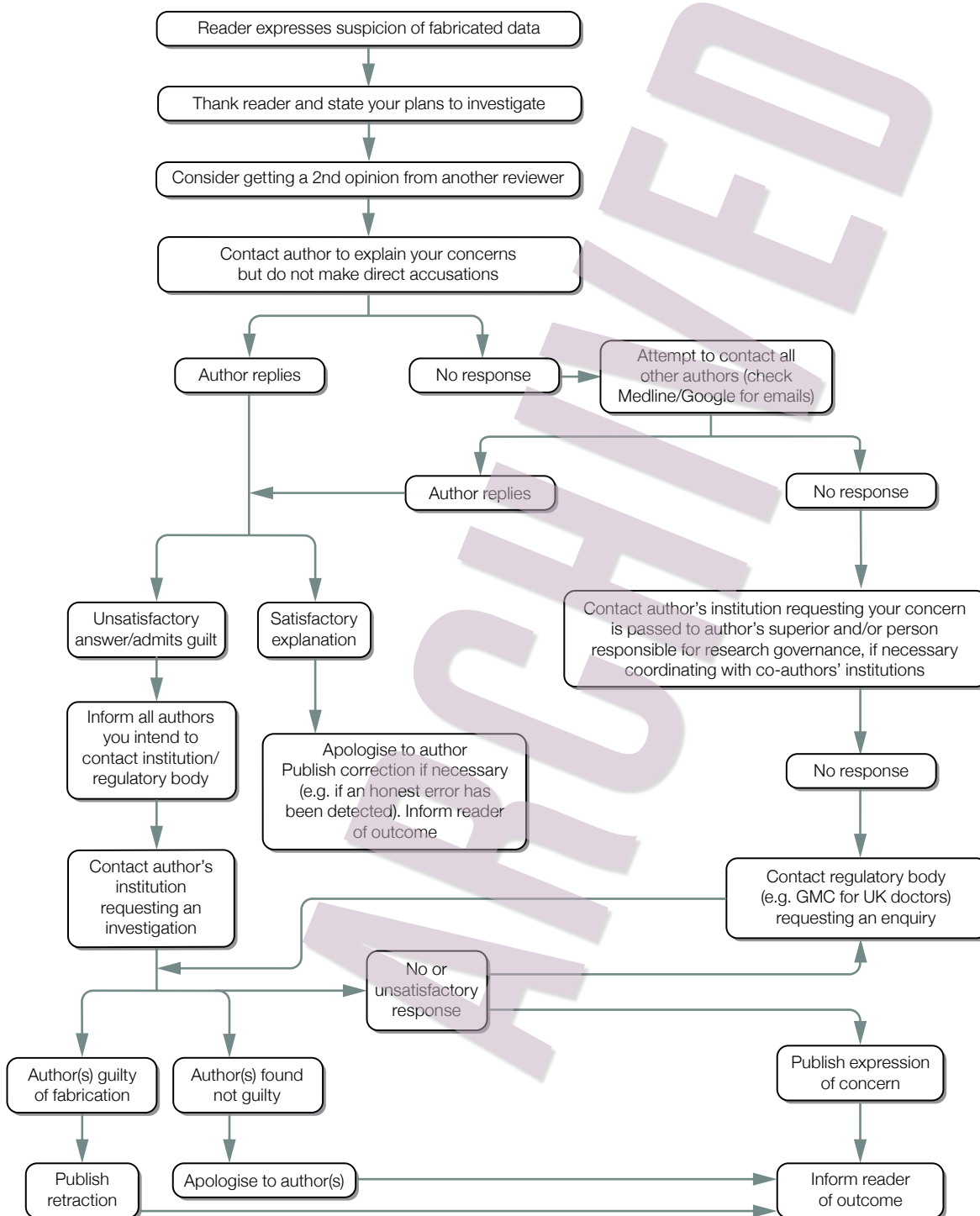


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What to do if you suspect fabricated data

(b) Suspected fabricated data in a published manuscript

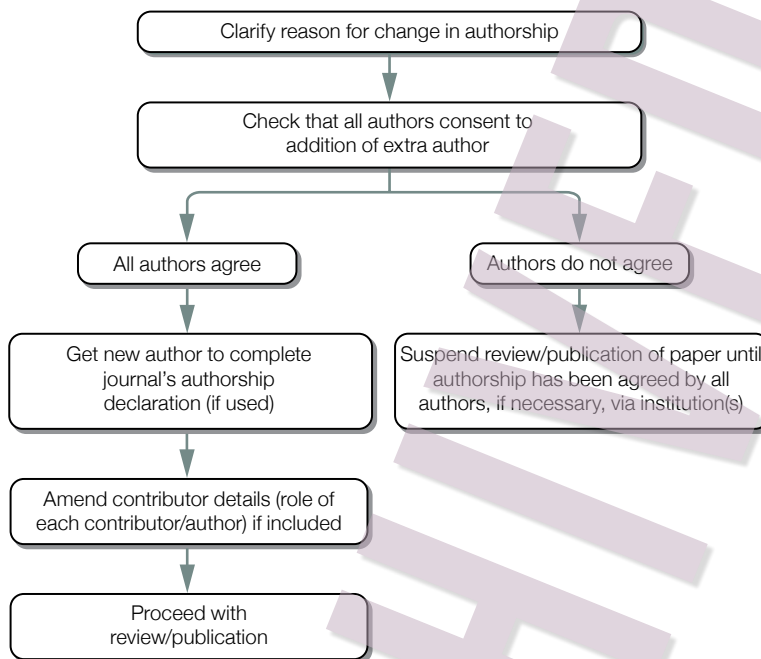


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Changes in authorship

(a) Corresponding author requests addition of extra author before publication



Note
Major changes in response to reviewer comments, e.g. adding new data might justify the inclusion of a new author

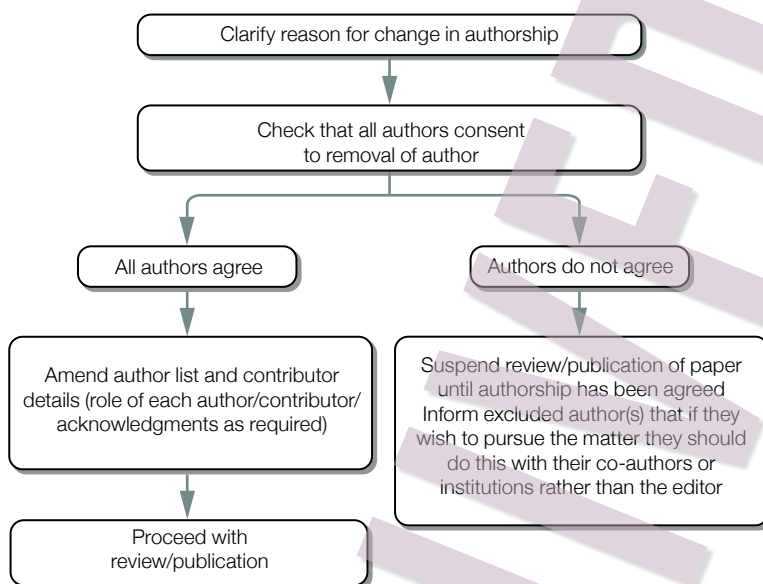
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Changes in authorship

(b) Corresponding author requests removal of author before publication



Note
Most important to check with the author(s) whose name(s) is/are being removed from the paper and get their agreement in writing

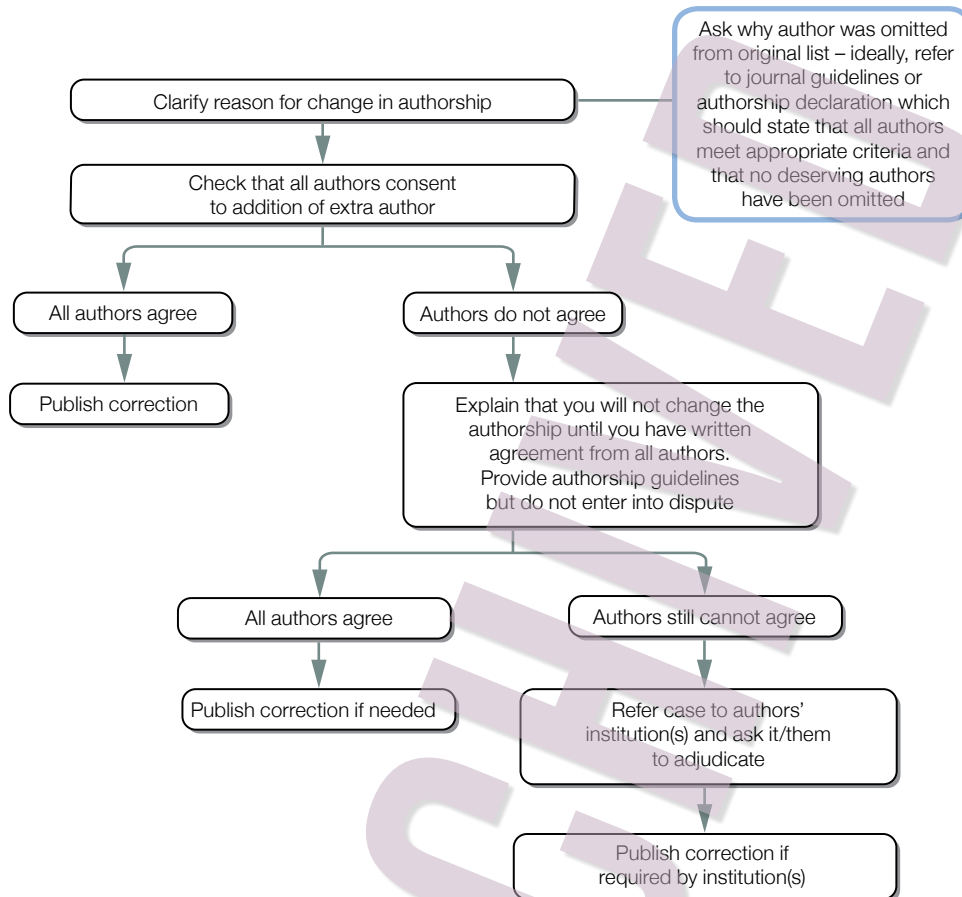
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Changes in authorship

(c) Request for addition of extra author after publication



To prevent future problems:

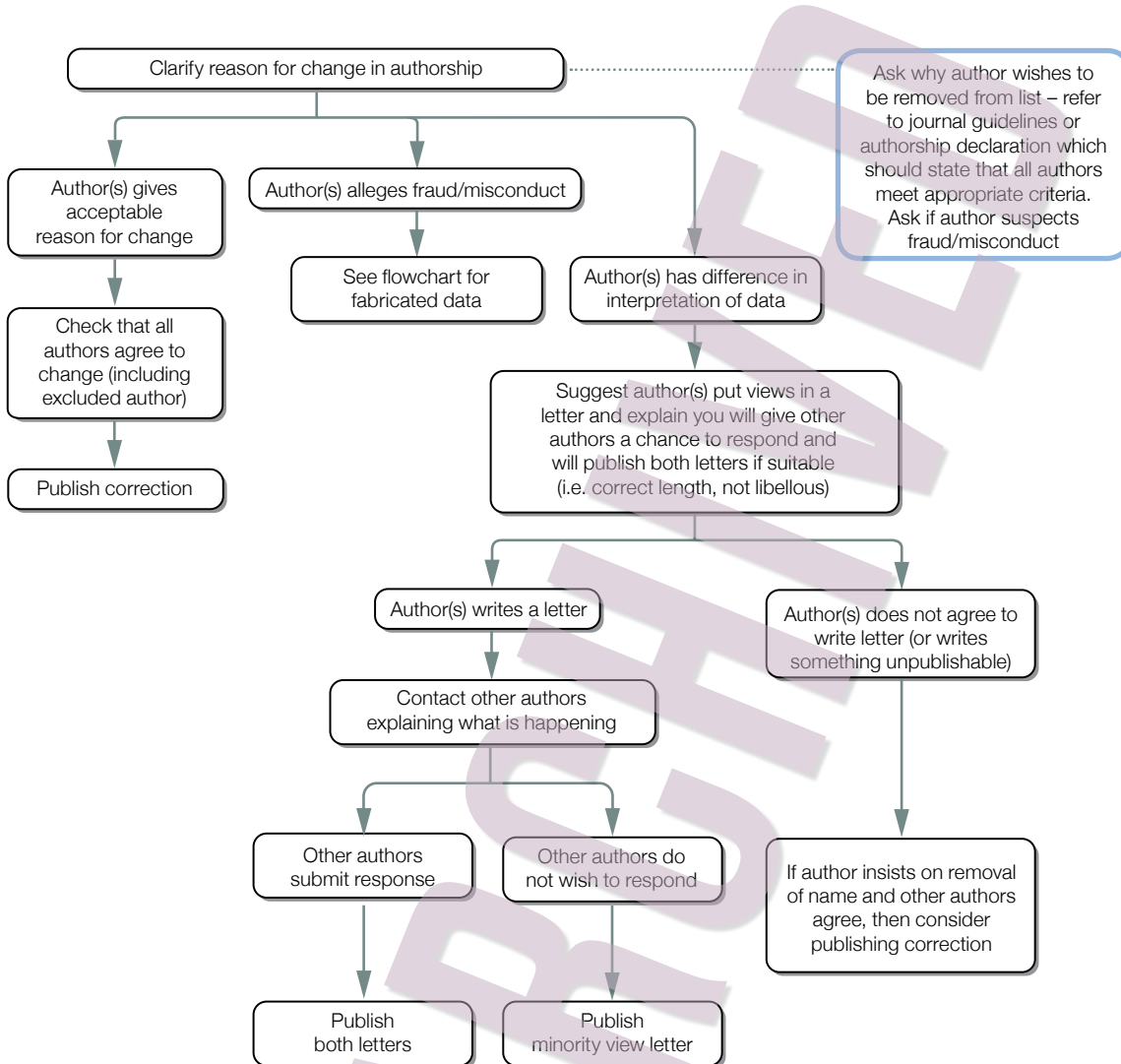
- (1) Before publication, get authors to sign statement that all listed authors meet authorship criteria and that no others meeting the criteria have been omitted
- (2) Publish details of each person's contribution to their search and publication

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Changes in authorship

(d) Request for removal of author after publication

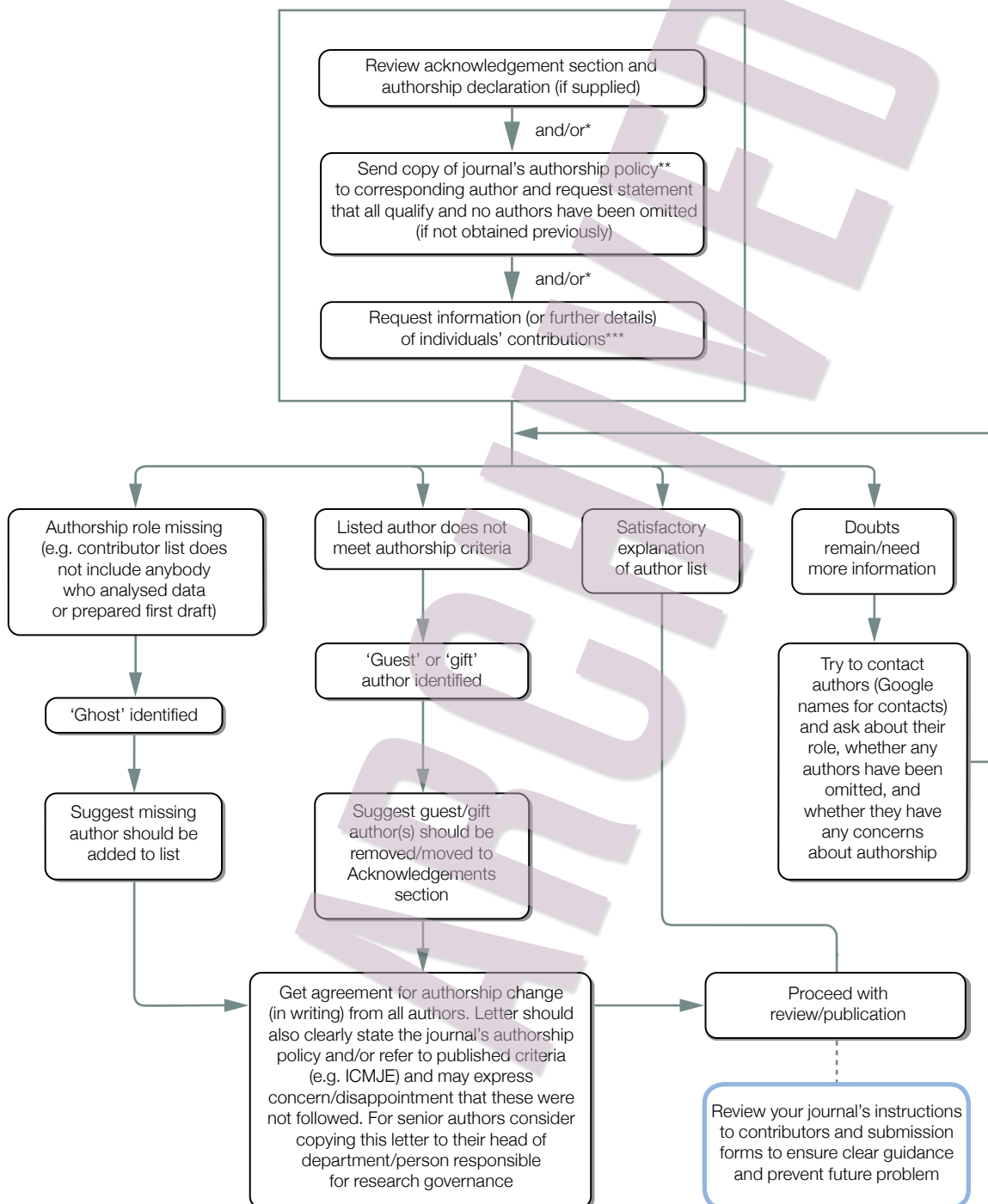


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What to do if you suspect ghost, guest or gift authorship

(see also flowcharts on Changes in authorship, as such requests may indicate the presence of a ghost or gift author)



***Note**
Initial action will depend on journal's normal method of collecting author/contributor info

****Note**
Including clear guidance/criteria for authorship in journal instructions makes it easier to handle such issues

*****Note**
Marusic et al. have shown that the method of collecting such data (e.g. free text or check boxes) can influence the response.

Letting authors describe their own contributions probably results in the most truthful and informative answers.

Reference
Marusic A, Bates T, Anic A et al. *How the structure of contribution disclosure statement affects validity of authorship: a randomised study in a general medical journal.* *Curr Med Res Opin* 2006;22:1035-44

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How to spot authorship problems

Editors cannot police author or contributor listing for every submission but may sometimes have suspicions that an author list is incomplete or includes undeserving (guest or gift) authors. The COPE flowchart on 'What to do if you suspect ghost, guest or gift authorship' suggests actions for these situations. The following points are designed to help editors be alert for inappropriate authorship and spot warning signs which may indicate problems.

Type of authorship problems

A ghost author is someone who is omitted from an authorship list despite qualifying for authorship. This is not necessarily the same as a ghost writer, since omitted authors often perform other roles, in particular data analysis. (Gotzsche et al. have shown that statisticians involved with study design are frequently omitted from papers reporting industry-funded trials.) If a professional writer has been involved with a publication it will depend on the authorship criteria being used whether s/he fulfils the criteria to be listed as an author. Using the ICMJE criteria for research papers, medical writers usually do not qualify as authors, but their involvement and funding source should be acknowledged.

A guest or gift author is someone who is listed as an author despite not qualifying for authorship. Guests are generally people brought in to make the list look more impressive (despite having little or no involvement with the research or publication). Gift authorship often involves mutual CV enhancement (i.e. including colleagues on papers in return for being listed on theirs).

Signs that might indicate authorship problems

- Corresponding author seems unable to respond to reviewers' comments
- Changes are made by somebody not on the author list (check Word document properties to see who made the changes but bear in mind there may be an innocent explanation for this, e.g. using a shared computer, or a secretary making changes)
- Document properties show the manuscript was drafted by someone not on the author list or properly acknowledged (but see above)
- Impossibly prolific author e.g. of review articles/opinion pieces (check also for redundant/overlapping publication) (this may be detected by a Medline or Google search using the author's name)
- Several similar review articles/editorials/opinion pieces have been published under different author names (this may be detected by a Medline or Google search using the article title or key words)
- Role missing from list of contributors (e.g. it appears that none of the named authors were responsible for analysing the data or drafting the paper)
- Unfeasibly long or short author list (e.g. a simple case report with a dozen authors or a randomised trial with a single author)
- Industry-funded study with no authors from sponsor company (this may be legitimate, but may also mean deserving authors have been omitted; reviewing the protocol may help determine the role of employees – see *Gotzsche et al.* and commentary by Wager)

References

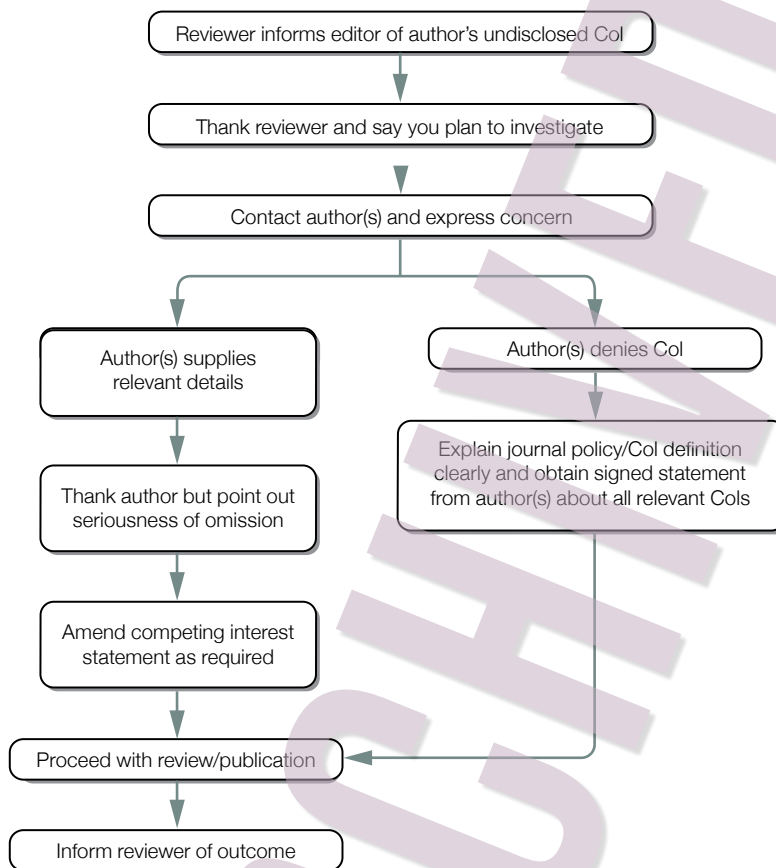
Gotzsche PC, Hrobjartsson A, Johansen HK, Haar MT, Altman DG et al. *Ghost authorship in industry-initiated randomised trials*. PLoS Med 2007; 4(1):e19. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.00440019

Wager E (2007) *Authors, Ghosts, Damned Lies, and Statisticians*. PLoS Med 2007;4(1):e34. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.0040034

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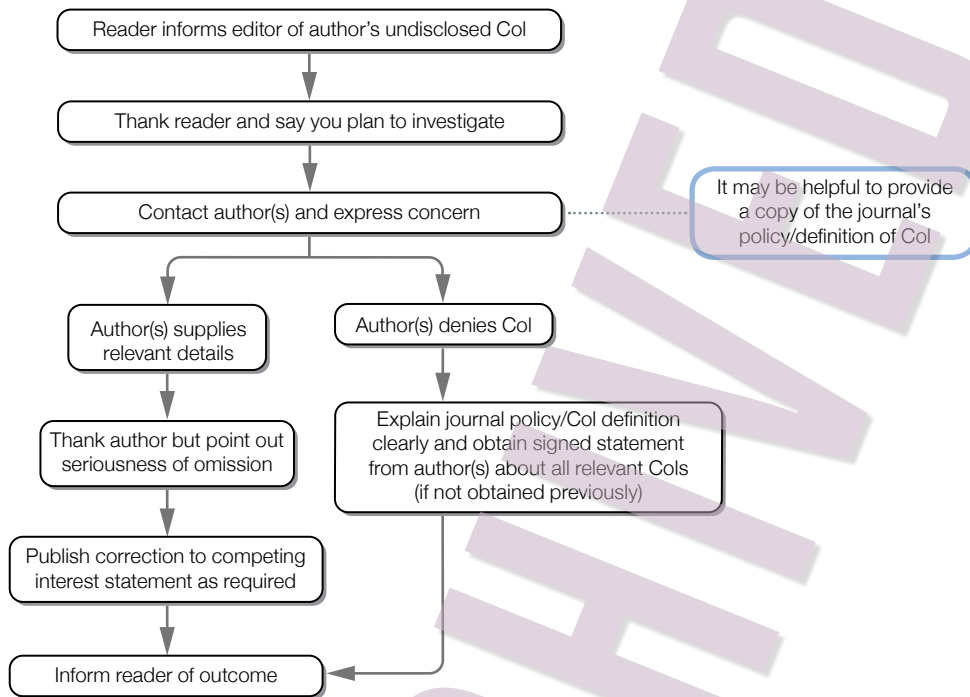
What to do if a reviewer suspects undisclosed conflict of interest (Col) in a submitted manuscript



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What to do if a reader suspects undisclosed conflict of interest (Col) in a published article



Notes

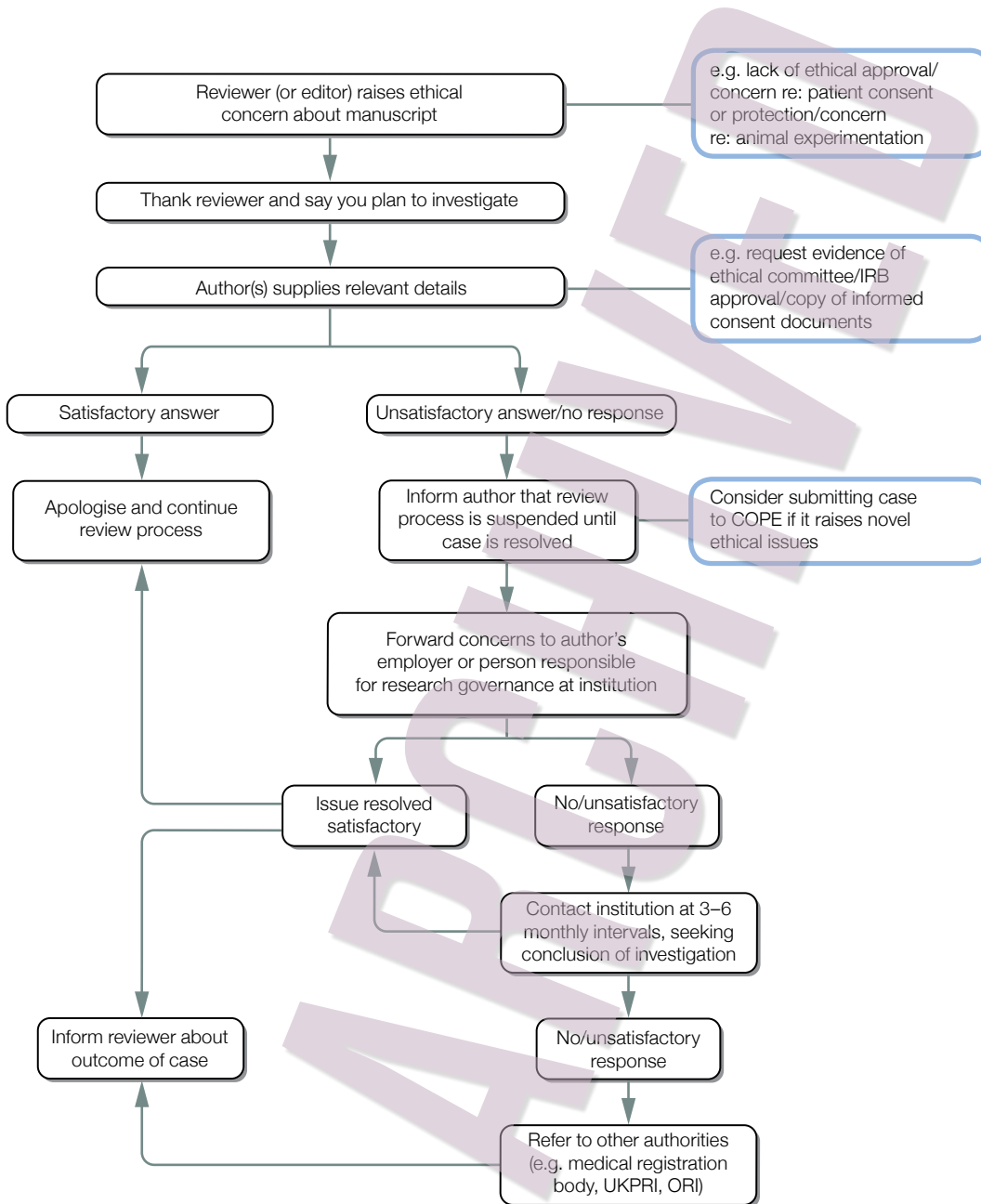
To avoid future problems:
 Always get signed statement of Cols from all authors and reviewers before publication.
 Ensure journal guidelines include clear definition of Col



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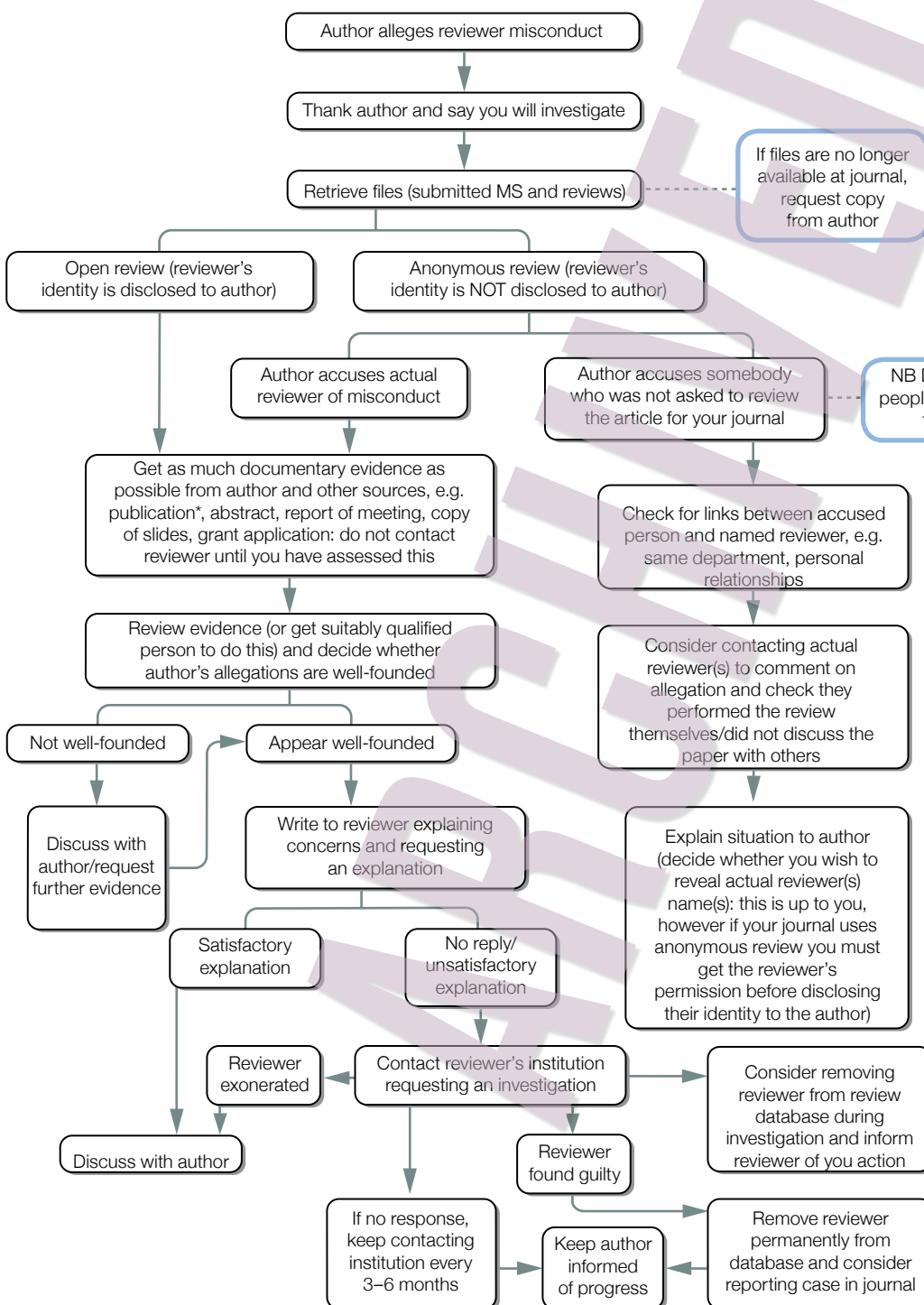
What to do if you suspect an ethical problem with a submitted manuscript



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What to do if you suspect a reviewer has appropriated an author's ideas or data



Note
The instruction to reviewers should state that submitted material must be treated in confidence and may not be used in any way until it has been published

Note
Options depend on type of review system used

***Note**
If author produces published paper this may be handled as plagiarism (see plagiarism flow chart)

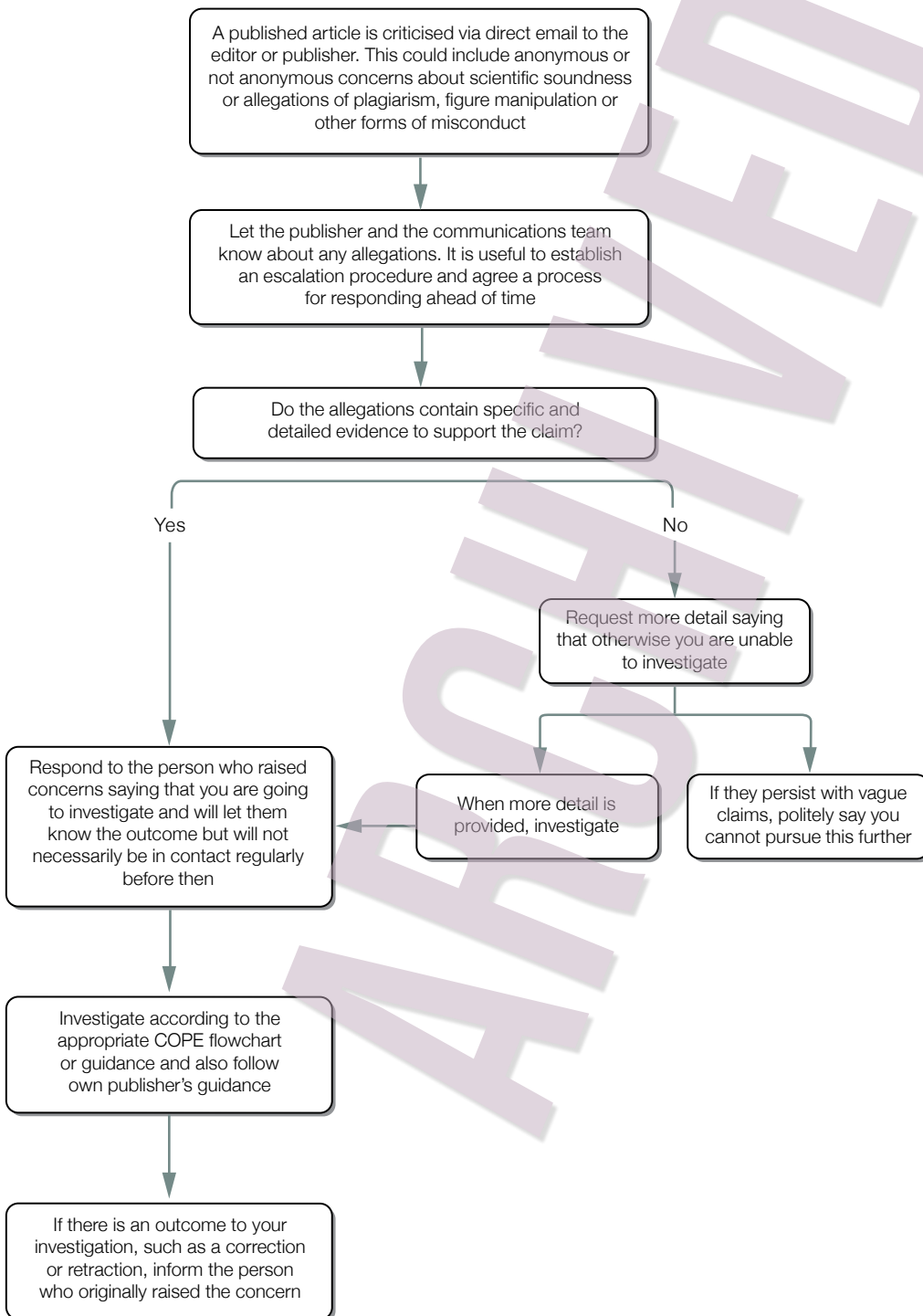
NB Do not forget people who refused to review

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How to respond to whistle blowers when concerns are raised directly



Note
The tone of the allegations may be aggressive or personal. Respond politely; don't get drawn into personal exchanges

Note
Sometimes the whistle blower may prefer to remain anonymous. It is important not to try to "out" people who wish to be anonymous

Developed in collaboration with BioMed Central

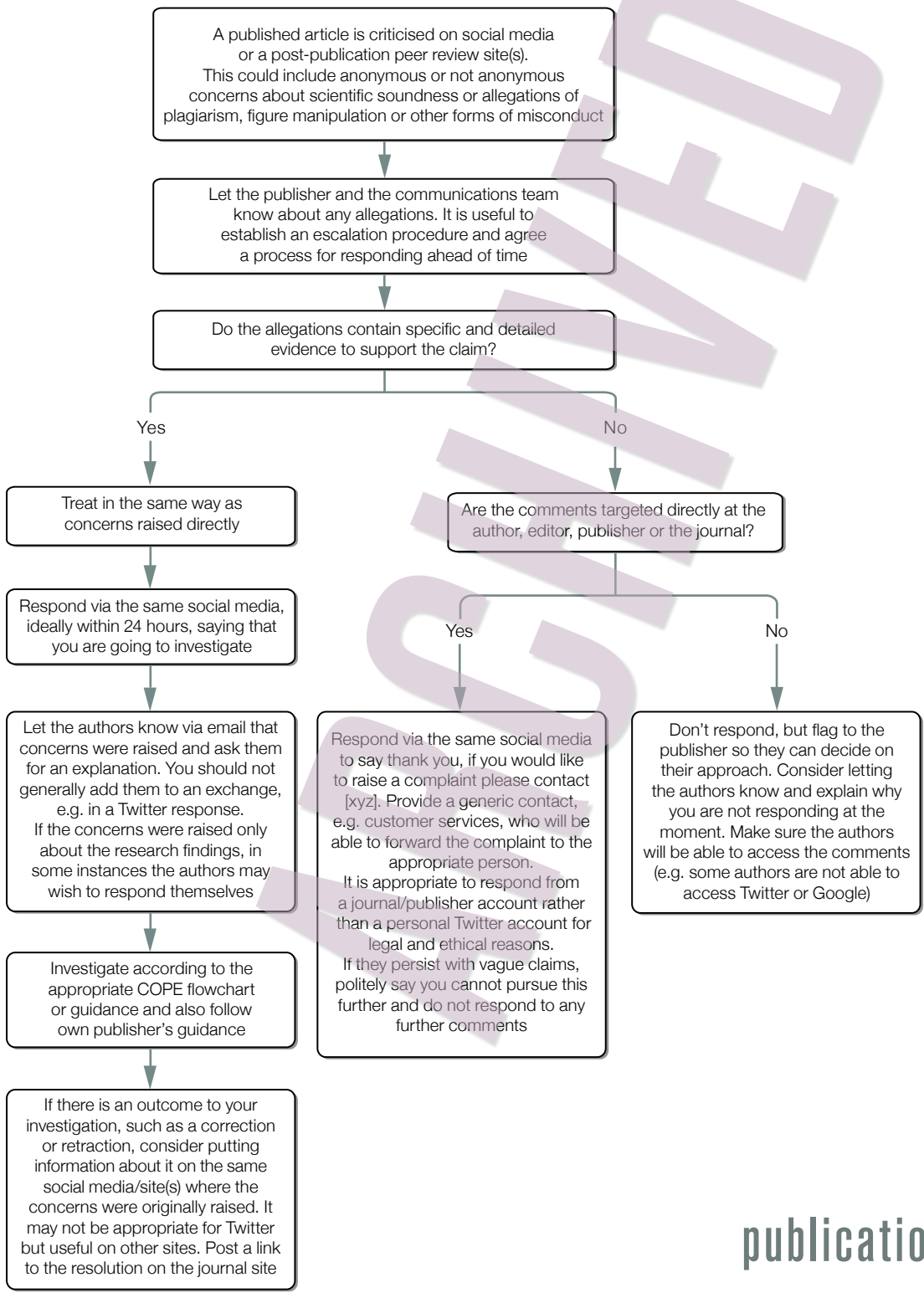
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How to respond to whistle blowers when concerns are raised via social media



Note
The tone of the allegations may be aggressive or personal. Respond politely; don't get drawn into personal exchanges

Note
Sometimes the whistle blower may prefer to remain anonymous. It is important not to try to "out" people who wish to be anonymous

Note
It is important to take the discussion away from the public domain; don't engage in specific discussions on social media

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