

Recognition could support a science code of conduct

SIR — Recent instances of scientifically unethical behaviour such as that of Woo Suk Hwang (see *Nature* **439**, 122–123; 2006) have put pressure on governments to take official measures. In Japan, for example, a data-falsification scandal shook the scientific community last year (see *Nature* **439**, 514; 2006). In response, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), together with the Science Council of Japan, has decided to implement a code of conduct for scientists to detect and punish unethical acts: see www.scj.go.jp/ja/info/kohyo/pdf/kohyo-20-s3e-1.pdf.

Like the Hippocratic oath for physicians, the application of such a code to all scientific disciplines would surely be beneficial, making young researchers aware of the necessity of adopting ethical behaviour in the conduct of their work and providing guidance on how to do so. Yet such misconduct must often stem from the ubiquitous pressure exerted on scientists to publish quickly and, if possible, in high-impact factor journals in order to have a career. The possibility of publishing a ground-breaking study depends on the quality and originality of the data. It can, therefore, become tempting to modify a few things here and there in a dataset.

In this regard, adoption of a scientific code of conduct may not be enough. Efforts must be made in parallel to counteract the ‘publish or perish’ dogma. If there were a method to recognize the value of a piece of work through the examination of its contribution to knowledge, rather than through the prestige of the journal in which it was published, this would be a good start.

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