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16 February 2015

Dr Virginia Barbour
Chair, COPE
Medicine & Biology Editorial Director
PLOS Brisbane
Australia

Dear Dr Barbour

Thank you for your email of 12 January 2015 and the attached note. Unfortunately, the specific concerns that were raised in our letter of 23 October 2014 have not been addressed by COPE.

Contrary to what is stated in the final paragraph on the first page of your note (and implied by the title of that note), we did not ask COPE to become involved in an individual editorial decision or to make a recommendation on medical issues related to papers published by the BMJ on statins.

We asked COPE to consider whether the BMJ had breached COPE's Code of Conduct for Journal Editors with regard to a set of specific concerns about editorial actions that are described in some detail in our letter (cross-referenced to the relevant sections of the Code) and supported by linked materials. This is stated explicitly at the bottom of the first page of our previous letter and in the final paragraph.

These issues have been drawn to the attention of the BMJ, as is indicated both in our letter and in the supporting materials that were linked to it (which we know COPE has not reviewed), but it has not addressed them. We would have no objection to our letters being forwarded to the BMJ so that it can provide COPE with explanations for its actions regarding each of these potential breaches.
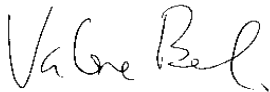
The COPE Code of Conduct is said to be a set of minimum standards to which all COPE members are expected to adhere, that COPE will consider complaints against any member who has not followed it, and that sanctions may be applied to a journal editor found to have breached the Code. Clearly in these circumstances it is not appropriate for the BMJ to decide if it is has breached COPE's Code and, instead, that should be determined by COPE itself.

We should be grateful if COPE would consider each of the specific issues described in our letter of 23 October 2014 (along with the supporting materials) and, as requested, decide whether COPE's Code of Conduct has been breached and, if so, what steps it will take. Otherwise, please explain precisely why COPE will not consider these potential breaches in accordance with its regulations.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Jane Armitage, FRCP FFPH
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University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

Professor Colin Baigent, FRCP FFPH
Professor of Epidemiology
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Professor Dame Valerie Beral, FRS FMedSci
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Professor Sir Nicholas Wald, FRS FMedSci
Professor of Environmental and Preventive Medicine
Queen Mary University of London, London, UK

cc Baroness Ilora Finlay, President of the British Medical Association
   Mr Jay Lippincott, Chairman of BMJ Publishing Group

encl: Submission to COPE of 23 October 2014