What to do if you suspect image manipulation in a published article

**READER EXPRESSES SUSPICION OF IMAGE MANIPULATION**

THANK READER AND STATE YOUR PLAN TO INVESTIGATE

Consider getting a 2nd opinion from another reviewer

Contact author to explain your concerns but do not make direct accusations

Response

Satisfactory explanation

Unsatisfactory answer

Contact author’s institution requesting your concern is passed to author’s superior and/or person responsible for research governance, if necessary coordinating with co-authors’ institutions

Authors not guilty of image manipulation

No response or inconclusive reply

Authors guilty of image manipulation

APLOGISE TO AUTHOR. PUBLISH CORRECTION IF NECESSARY (EG, IF AN HONEST ERROR HAS BEEN DETECTED THAT DOES NOT INVALIDATE CONCLUSIONS)

CONSIDER CONTACTING AUTHORS’ INSTITUTION EVERY 3-6 MONTHS

If no resolution, consider contacting the authorities, eg, ORI in US, GMC in UK. Consider publishing an Expression of Concern

INFORM READER OF OUTCOME

PUBLISH A RETRACTION (OR CONSIDER A CORRECTION IF THE MANIPULATION IS VERY MINOR AND THE MAJORITY OF THE RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE ARTICLE REMAIN VALID), CONTACTING ALL AUTHORS AND TELLING THEM WHAT YOU PLAN TO DO

Authors not guilty of image manipulation

No response or inconclusive reply

Inform authors’ superior and/or person responsible for research governance at authors’ institutions, and inform authors

APLOGISE TO AUTHOR.

**WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT IMAGE MANIPULATION IN A PUBLISHED ARTICLE**

This flowchart relates only to cases where concerns related to digital photographic images are raised (eg, duplication of parts within an image, or use of identical images to show different things). For wider concerns about potential data fabrication, please consult the flowchart ‘Suspected fabricated data in a published manuscript’