

ICM Editors' reply to a letter by Wiedermann "Institutional recommendation for the withdrawal of scientific articles from Joachim Boldt"

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ICM Editors' reply to a letter by Wiedermann "Institutional recommendation for the withdrawal of scientific articles from Joachim Boldt"

Giuseppe Citerio* on behalf of the ICM Editorial Board

We the Editorial Board of Intensive Care Medicine (ICM) acknowledge receipt of the Letter to the Editor by C. J. Wiedermann [1] concerning the body of work by Joachim Boldt [2]. Wiedermann calls upon ICM to support research integrity by re-evaluating the articles by Boldt that have not been retracted.

Integrity in research requires that authors publish results of an honest, rigorous, transparent and open research process, undertaken with care and respect. Scientific misconduct could have an impact on clinical management at the bedside as has happened in the past with Boldt's work [3].

Therefore, ICM is considering seriously the question raised about the integrity of science and scientific misconduct [4–6]. Some editorial actions had already been taken in 2011: nine articles were retracted by ICM following a statement by the Editors in Chief of 11 journals, including ICM, regarding Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of clinical trials undertaken by Boldt. The current Editor-in-Chief acted in 2020 by retracting further articles published in ICM after having them re-reviewed by a panel of specialists. Papers that based their conclusion on subsequently retracted articles were also retracted because this rendered their content unreliable. Priority was given to the relatively recent articles, documented, and liable to impact on clinical decisions and ultimately on patients' health.

A discussion with the Publisher was started some time ago after the request of colleagues to reconsider all of Boldt's bibliography. However, retracting a published article is a lengthy process, and Publishers require many steps with all the authors based on detailed allegations, according to guidelines of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). The process is meant to guarantee that the decision to retract is based on evidence.

We followed COPE's Retraction guidelines [7] but our investigation was inconclusive due to the difficulties in accessing the original documentation of work performed many years ago. By the admission of the investigative board of Klinikum Ludwigshafen in 2011, original data and other information are not available for all articles, thus making it very difficult to ascertain the allegations. The statement by Justus Liebig University dated 14.11.2018 invites Editors to consider retraction of all Boldt's papers "*even if there is no obvious indication of falsification*".

The ICM Editors, after receiving Wiedermann letter, are now working with the Publisher to retract the remaining articles where Boldt is the responsible author and to annotate his other articles with an 'expression of concern' note.

Even though evidence of fraud cannot be ascertained, the Editors considered it prudent to proceed and warn readers about the unreliability of Joachim Boldt's scientific production again.

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Declarations

Conflicts of interest
None to declare.

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