



Response to the Missing Manuscript editorial

I read with considerable disquiet the editorial about the “missing manuscript” in the debate on the Unfortunate Experiment.¹

Three things concerned me about this editorial. The first was the suggestion that Professor Paul’s career had been “built at least in part on these issues”. The same could be said about any academic who publishes on any issue. Thus, in my view this is an inappropriate statement, and the reason for making it is unclear.

The second issue of concern is the statement that Professor Paul’s manuscript was “very wordy”. It is not usual for peer reviewers to report their views on a manuscript publicly, and I believe it sets a disappointing precedent.

The third issue of concern is that the editorial seems to advocate airing the two sides of a debate, even though the scientific evidence supports only one side; that expressed by Professor Paul. The New Zealand Press Council identified a similar issue, stating that while it was obliged to uphold the freedom of publications to hold to a position against the weight of informed opinion, this could damage the credibility of the publication:

“The Council is obliged to uphold the freedom of publications to take a position, and hold to it if they choose, against the weight of informed opinion. No publication operates in a vacuum. All are vulnerable to criticism of their material in other media and all can suffer if their conduct costs them credibility.”²

In my opinion, the risk to credibility is even greater for a scientific journal, and the credibility of the New Zealand Medical Journal has been damaged.

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References:

1. Frizelle FA. The missing manuscript. NZ Med J 2010; 123: 11-13.
<http://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/123-1319/4252/>
2. New Zealand Press Council. Case number 2110. Professor Charlotte Paul against the New Zealand Listener. March 2010
http://www.presscouncil.org.nz/display_ruling.php?case_number=2110