STATEMENT ON ETHICAL RESEARCH AND SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING PRACTICES

JOINTLY ISSUED BY ASSAf, CHE, DHET, NRF AND USAf

Since the global adoption of the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity in 2010 (www.singaporestatement.org), which we jointly subscribe to, adherence to its principles has not improved. In support of ensuring quality research of high integrity in South Africa and globally, we find it impelling to reiterate to the South African research community the fundamental principles of scholarly research and publishing (which we endorse) and appeal to this community to act demonstrably in advancing research integrity. The following principles should inform ethical research and scholarly publishing practices:

1. **Responsibility:** It is the responsibility of individual researchers, postgraduate students, academic societies, journal publishers and boards, universities, all university staff (including research support services) and all organisations supporting research and knowledge generation, to be aware of and adhere to regulations related to research, to actively maintain academic and research integrity and to report or act upon any unethical practices they may discover. At an institutional level, requisite policies and procedures for monitoring, investigating, censuring and reporting unethical practices, must be developed. The anonymity of those reporting such practices must be protected.

2. **Ethics and integrity:** Researchers are responsible for their own research, and for research performed under their supervision, and must take due care to ensure the publication only of authentic, accurate and reproducible findings, including findings that do not support their working hypotheses.

3. **Methodology and data:** Researchers must use appropriate research methods, assess all outcomes critically, maintain a full record of the research including all supporting data, and objectively interpret and report findings.

4. **Authorship:** All authors who made an intellectual contribution to the research publication, and only those authors, must be included as contributing authors. The sequence of authors should follow discipline-specific practices. All authors must read and approve the final draft prior to submission.

5. **Acknowledgement of contributions:** As well as acknowledging all authors, researchers must acknowledge all those who made a material contribution to the research or publication but who do not meet authorship criteria. This includes indigenous originators of the knowledge, funders, sponsors, manuscript editors and language reviewers. In addition, all knowledge (published or unpublished) used in the research must be appropriately referenced/cited and acknowledged.

6. **Peer review:** Peer-reviewers must be sufficiently qualified for the role, and the process of review must be fair, objective, and rigorous, while respecting anonymity and confidentiality where this is applicable. All research publishers and funders of research must avail their peer-review policies to authors.

7. **Social awareness:** Researchers and institutions must be sensitive to the potential impact of their research on society, marginal groups or individuals, and must consider these when weighing the benefits of the research against any harmful effects, with a view to minimising or avoiding the latter where possible.

8. **Conflicts of interest:** All possible conflicts of interest, whether financial or personal, must be declared and preferably avoided in research and in other scholarly activities such as peer review, research proposals and public comment.

9. **Editorial:** In cases where editors or members of editorial boards submit manuscripts to their own journals, editorial handling of the papers concerned must be independent of the author in process terms, up to and including the decision to publish or not, as the case may be.

10. **Research publishing environment:** Research institutions (including agencies supporting and funding research) must ensure an environment which encourages ethical research practices through education, stewardship, and clear and fair policies and practices that promote research ethics, integrity and compliance. This includes the way in which research funding or research incentives are allocated and spent. Care has to be taken to ensure that the research funding system does not incentivise perverse research and publication practices that compromise research integrity.

11. **Predatory journals and unethical editorial practices:** Researchers are responsible for avoiding falling victim to predatory publishing or unethical editorial practices. The onus is on an individual or group of researchers, and institutional processes of scrutiny, to ensure that the avenues selected for publishing their research are authentic and credible.

12. **Quality over quantity:** Researchers are reminded that publishing the outputs of their research in good quality, high-impact journals, is always preferable from a longer term career perspective, to the publication of incremental outputs in low quality journals. 'Salami slicing' of outputs to increase publication numbers should be avoided.

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