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## Another Fable

After serving two years as the editor-in-chief of a prestigious medical journal, he walked in a nearby forest and once again lost his way. As he entered a clearing in the midst of the woods, he encountered the old, wise man who had encouraged him to accept the position two years earlier.

"Hello there," said the wise man. "How are you enjoying your term?"

The editor replied, "I didn't know that I'm supposed to enjoy it."

"You're not. I was just wondering how things are going."

"I've been troubled by several issues."

"I thought that all of the issues have come out on time."

"No, not that kind of issue. I have gotten them out on time. That's not a problem.

The issues troubling me are 'conflict of interest' and 'originality'."

"What's the problem? I know you. I know that you adhere to the highest principles on both these issues."

"Well, take 'conflict of interest'."

"That's a very important issue."

"I know. And we require signed statements by all authors."

"So, what is the problem?"

"There are those who say our procedures are not thorough and that we must be absolutely certain that we have eliminated all conflicts."

"Try eliminating articles by people who care about the subject. Publish only work by disinterested authors."

"All of our authors are interested in nuclear medicine and want to see it improve. I also believe that they have integrity about their work and their manuscripts.

"You've simply got to be more cautious than that. Encourage anyone interested in nuclear medicine to publish in other specialty journals and only accept articles from those who are not interested in nuclear medicine."

"That sounds ridiculous!"

"Look, if you want to avoid conflict, that is what I recommend. By the way, how do ensure 'no conflict of interest' among your reviewers?"

"Our reviewers all have extensive experience and published articles in peer-reviewed journals. They are conscientious, knowledgeable and are asked to attest that they have no conflict."

"Not good enough! Reviewers from the same country are apt to be biased on the basis of national pride."

"Are you suggesting that I should only choose reviewers from countries other than the source of the manuscript?"

"No, they may also have a bias. Try to use people who are neither from the same country as the paper of origin nor from another country.

"How do I do that?"

"Use a computerized database. These new software packages can do anything you ask them to do."

"I'm not sure your suggestions will work. By the way, what are your ideas on 'originality'?"

"First of all, how about you? Are you creating your own standards or are your standards consistent with those of JAMA?"

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### **Scatter**

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“Well of course we want to be consistent with JAMA.”

“As I suspected. Not very original, are you? You should be more original in your standards. Try something innovative!”

“What do you mean?”

“I noticed that all of your articles contain many references. Why don't you eliminate them?”

“You're supposed to reference the ideas of others. That avoids accusations of plagiarism.”

“Well, you can't have it both ways. You want your articles to be original, but you won't let the authors claim their ideas are 'new' or 'the first observation', and then you make them reference everything. How can you do that and claim that everything you publish is original? Anyway, your reviewers criticize everything new. They usually don't believe something that hasn't been observed before.”

“I'm not finding you very helpful. I had hoped that I could rely on the integrity and competence of the authors, reviewers and editorial board members, including me. What's wrong with that?”

“How long have you been lost in these woods?”

**Stanley J. Goldsmith, MD**

*Editor-in-Chief, The Journal of Nuclear Medicine*

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