

Dear Professor Tanimoto and colleagues,

Thank you for your patience while we have been waiting for COPE to advise whether they consider that we have followed their guidelines regarding the withdrawal of your four Letters. COPE's response can be found below:

#### COPE RESPONSE

The journal's decision to withdraw the acceptance of these letters is reasonable as the authors did not provide evidence that the data used in the letters were not based on the unconsented data. The authors need to be able to prove that the data they are using for their submission are valid and have the required ethical consent; if they are using third party data and cannot prove this, they should revise the submission or accept that the paper will not be published. The assumption is that the four letters, which could be critiquing one or both papers, come from at least two separate sets of authors, so there is no issue of salami letters.

If the letters are directly and solely based on the results of the affected papers, rejection should be straightforward. If they mention the papers among other cited research in a commentary or even a research type letter, the authors could remove the affected material and references, without referring to the retracted papers. If the letters cite the papers in the context of journalology, or criticise the same issues that underlie later retraction, it could be argued the letters could stay, with an explanatory editorial note (see for example <https://retractionwatch.com/2020/06/22/tortuous-and-torturous-why-publishing-a-critical-letter-to-the-editor-is-so-difficult/> ).

An intermediate solution might be to consider adding a note indicating that the articles were retracted and why. The journal could then ask the authors of the letters to adapt what they have written with this in mind and focus on what else they might want to say. The editor could write a forward to this, outlining what was done and why the letters are being published as part of a debate around the issues involving the retraction.

The journal's policy is clear that they may decide to change the acceptance decision in exceptional circumstances. The journal might consider updating their policies or having their own code of conduct, based on COPE's core practices, in relation to submissions. In hindsight, perhaps the letters should not have been accepted during the investigation but rather put on hold first; a relevant office policy or process could be developed to prevent this in the future. It is also commendable that the journal has a statement on the consent from guardians/parents of children; the journal might wish to include a statement on assent.

We have interpreted the above as COPE advising that we should not publish the Letters, as they are "directly and solely based on the results of the

affected papers". The data the Letters are commenting on includes the glass badge data, which has been determined by the Date City investigation as being ethically unreliable as consent was not gathered from all participants.

COPE's alternative suggestion is that "the authors could remove the affected material and references, without referring to the retracted papers". However, we are of the opinion that removing material that concerns the glass badge data, including results and conclusions derived from the glass badge data would remove almost all the content of the Letters. However, if the Letter authors believe revisions to this extent are possible, the journal will consider revised versions of the Letters. Depending on the extent of changes made, the Letters may need to go through peer review again.

In summary, we take COPE's response to suggest two options:

1. The withdrawal of the Letters by IOP Publishing stands
2. The authors revise the Letters removing the affected material and references

We are also happy to keep open the offer to you of a new submission on general points about radiological protection after the Fukushima accident.

Again, we regret that the Letters were accepted before the investigation on the two retracted papers was complete. As previously stated, we have since updated our internal policies to ensure this does not happen again.

Please let us know how you would like to proceed.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Seymour', written in a cursive style.

Antonia Seymour