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# Retracted, De-retracted, then Re-retracted: Do "Industrialization" of the Retraction Process and the Trivialization of Publisher Error Play a Part?

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**Abstract**

*This case study, which looks at the issue of the potential mismanagement of knowledge, as an intellectual resource, details the case of nine peer-reviewed papers that were published by a high-volume open-access biomedical journal run by a major commercial scientific publisher. According to their retraction notices (RNs), those papers were retracted due to "significant concerns [. . . ] raised about the compliance with ethical policies for human research and the integrity of the data reported". Despite initial guarantees of quality control (peer review), and additional indirect assurances of post-publication quality control (reflected in the RNs), all nine retracted papers were de-retracted on 1 March 2024, i.e., all nine retractions were rescinded. All RNs and publisher notes (for the de-retractions) contain identical (i.e., cloned) text. This paper reflects on whether there was an apparent "industrialization" of the retraction and de-retraction processes. Moreover, was editorial failure and publisher error trivialized, despite the existence of an apology in the cloned publisher notes and RNs? Concerns of procedural mismanagement are amplified by the re-retraction of two of the nine papers, sometime around April 2024. The journal and publisher are Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) members, so imperfect peer review and apparent mismanagement of the retraction process – via de-retraction and re-retraction – also reflect poorly on these parties. Finally, six of the nine papers that were de-retracted in early 2024 are still indicated as being retracted on PubMed in November 2025.*

## Nine retractions, nine de-retractions

The retraction of an academic paper – even more so where peer review and editorial handling were involved – suggests all-round failure because it tends to reflect poorly on several – if not all – of the agents involved during the publication process (Teixeira da Silva, 2016). This negative perception exists independent of the agent to which blame is assigned in the retraction notice (RN). Retractions exist primarily to correct incorrigible errors and scientific flaws, but they may also serve to punish misconduct (Moylan & Kowalczuk, 2016; Teixeira da Silva & Dobránszki, 2017; Teixeira da Silva, 2022). For authors, retractions can be a career-altering experience and a reason for shame among peers (Azoulay et al., 2017; Teixeira da Silva & Al-Khatib, 2021; Xu & Hu, 2022a, 2024). For the journal, its associated editorial board, and publisher, retractions reflect – to some extent or another – failed peer review, editorial mishandling, or process mismanagement.

This case study focuses on nine papers previously retracted from a high-volume biomedical open-access journal operated by a major commercial scientific publisher. As a biologist interested in the process of retraction and open-access publishing, the publisher's website was consulted at the time of the retractions, along with comments posted on a public post-publication discussion forum, PubPeer (PubPeer, 2024). These nine papers were simultaneously de-retracted on 1 March 2024 (Table 1). In other words, all nine retractions were rescinded, as a cluster, analogous to a product batch during an industrial manufacturing process. Both the journal and publisher are Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) members. In all nine cases, the publisher's note (PN) accompanying the de-retraction process offers the exact same wording, highlighting three aspects: "Due to a publisher error, a retraction notice was incorrectly issued on the article"; "We have now removed the retraction notice"; "We apologize to the authors

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for this error". Of note, none of the nine PNs indicated precisely who the responsible agents were, invoking an elusive "we". Despite the existence of an apology, it is unclear why the RNs do not explain how this reputationally costly error arose. In all nine cases, the PDF files, which supposedly had a red "RETRACTED" stamped across every page when they were in their retracted status, were returned to their unretracted and originally published state. However, on 10 March 2024, these papers were still marked as retracted on PubMed (Fig. 1A), and although the PDF files were not publicly available – likely due to exceptions for retracted papers indexed on PubMed Commons (PMC, 2024) – the RNs for the original nine retractions can fortunately still be found (Table 1). Between 10 March and 13 May 2024, when an initial update of these nine cases was made, quite surprisingly, two of the de-retracted papers were once again found to be retracted (i.e., they were re-retracted), one being issued a standard RN, while the other was issued a non-standard "Statement of Removal". The retracted, de-retracted and re-retracted status of all nine papers was verified again on 16 November 2025.

An analysis of the nine papers' original RNs also indicates identical wording for all, i.e., they are template RNs, hinting at an "industrial" (i.e., mass produced) process, except for specific and unique information pertaining to each paper (e.g., authors, title, etc.). This also suggests that the retractions were issued, like the PNs, as a cluster. The RNs are as opaque as the PNs, and offer no details about what fateful errors or unscientific facts led to the simultaneous demise of this cluster of papers. The RNs indicate that the retractions took place according to COPE policies and procedures, presumably COPE (2019), a document that was updated in August 2025, which authors and scientists assume are error-free and carefully considered prior to issuing a retraction. No individuals (or other agents of responsibility) are named in the nine PNs or RNs, even though individuals were surely responsible for the ethics investigations, drafting the wording of these notices, and accepting the responsibility associated with the errors. If specific individuals are not named, then who exactly is responsible, and if specific reasons and background are not provided, then how can authors who might wish to cite these papers trust the de-retracted versions and the RNs and PNs themselves? Opaque RNs that carry a bare minimum of transparent information reduce or eliminate accountability of the agents involved (Xu & Hu, 2018; Hu & Xu, 2020; Teixeira da Silva & Vuong, 2022; Xu & Hu, 2022b). It has thus been advocated that the editors or editor-in-chief should be named in RNs (Teixeira da Silva, 2025a).

Although nine is hardly an "industrial" number, it is still a substantial number. The cloned text of the nine RNs and PNs suggests that their baseline wording is not being given individual attention, but is resembling a process of mass production, i.e., "industrialization", akin to mass retractions, which have started to become more common in recent years (Teixeira da Silva, 2025b). Moreover, if the apology is also cloned and "industrialized", it gives the impression of insincerity. The re-retraction of two of the nine de-retracted papers, in essence representing a third round of procedural mismanagement, further accentuates the seeming trivialization of the process of retraction and thus knowledge management. In such cases, the publication of the peer reviewers' reports would be merited as they would carry procedural value. Mismanagement of the retraction procedure (Deculllier & Maisonneuve, 2018) risks breeding mistrust in the efficiency of COPE policies, or their ineffective implementation, and in the peer review and editorial and management of the journal and publisher.

## Is the content of the original retraction notices true or false?

Except for the two re-retracted papers, at the time of analysis, the PDF files of the RNs could only still be obtained from PubMed, but not from the Journal website where the URLs for all RNs revealed a 404 error (Fig. 1B), and stated the exact same information regarding these papers, as follows: "The Publisher of the journal have [sic] retracted the following article: [specific details of each paper added]. Since publication, significant concerns have been raised about the compliance with ethical policies for human research and the integrity of the data reported in the article. When approached for an explanation, the authors provided some original data but were not able to provide all the necessary supporting information. As verifying the validity of published work is core to the scholarly record's integrity, we are retracting the article. All authors listed in this publication have been informed. We have been informed in our decision-making by our editorial policies and the COPE guidelines. The retracted article will remain online to maintain the scholarly record, but it will be digitally watermarked on each page as "Retracted". In this quote, text in square brackets was inserted by the author while the publisher's name was anonymized. Although that status was true in May 2024, several months after the initial retraction and then the subsequent de-retraction, those papers whose final status is now (16 November 2025) "de-retracted", have the original (supposedly) PDF files available. Only the

| Case # | Paper DOI | RN DOI | Publisher's note DOI |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 10.1080/21655979.2021.2011638 | 10.1080/21655979.2024.2302658 | 10.1080/21655979.2024.2326357 |
| 2 | 10.1080/21655979.2021.2006865 | 10.1080/21655979.2024.2302657 [2] | 10.1080/21655979.2024.2326360 |
| 3 | 10.1080/21655979.2021.2005742 | 10.1080/21655979.2024.2302654 | 10.1080/21655979.2024.2326361 |
| 4 | 10.1080/21655979.2021.2003926 | 10.1080/21655979.2024.2302653 | 10.1080/21655979.2024.2326364 |
| 5 | 10.1080/21655979.2021.2000258 | 10.1080/21655979.2024.2302652 | 10.1080/21655979.2024.2326365 |
| 6 | 10.1080/21655979.2021.1997697 | 10.1080/21655979.2024.2302650 | 10.1080/21655979.2024.2326367 |
| | | RN #2: 10.1080/21655979.2024.2340165 [3] | |
| 7 | 10.1080/21655979.2021.1996016 | 10.1080/21655979.2024.2302649 | 10.1080/21655979.2024.2326368 |
| 8 | 10.1080/21655979.2021.1995573 | 10.1080/21655979.2024.2302648 | 10.1080/21655979.2024.2326372 |
| 9 | 10.1080/21655979.2021.1987083 | 10.1080/21655979.2024.2302647 | 10.1080/21655979.2024.2326376 |
| **Case #** | **# Authors** | **CA ORCID** | **Citations[1]** |
| 1 | 2 | None | 2 *, ** |
| 2 | 6 | 0000-0002-9178-8694 | 5 *, ** |
| 3 | 8 | None | 5 *, **, *** |
| 4 | 5 | None | 2 **, *** |
| 5 | 7 | None | 6 *, **, *** |
| 6 | 6 | 0000-0002-7274-2316 | 5 ** |
| 7 | 3 | 0000-0002-3016-4212 | 0 **, *** |
| 8 | 3 | 0000-0001-6571-1880 | 8 *, **, *** |
| 9 | 4 | None | 6 *, **, *** |

[1] According to Google Scholar (assessed: 16 November 2025); unfiltered for duplicates, etc.
[2] The paper was re-retracted, and labelled as a removal; however, there is no separate RN, and only a HTML "Statement of Removal" exists; the date when this action was taken by Taylor & Francis is unclear
[3] Date of re-retraction: 19 April 2024
Abbreviations: CA, corresponding author; DOI, digital object identifier; ORCID, Open Researcher and Contributor ID; PN, publisher's note; RN, retraction notice
* Indicated as retracted on Google Scholar on 10 March 2024 (Fig. 1C), but not any longer
** Indexed on the Retraction Watch database (Retraction Watch, 2025) on 17 November 2025 (searched by titles and DOIs)
*** Even though the paper was de-retracted, its status was indicated as "Retracted" at PubMed on 17 November 2025

**Table 1:** *Bibliometric summary of nine papers retracted, then de-retracted, from Bioengineered, a Taylor & Francis open access journal.*

two re-retracted papers' PDF files are not available. There are several issues in these published, de-published, and now re-depublished (for two cases) statements that merit additional scrutiny, and that raise a number of questions that would benefit peers and potentially citing authors:

1) Why was only the publisher involved in the retraction, and not the editors, or why were the editors not mentioned by name in the RNs?

2) What exactly were the "significant concerns" initially raised about these papers? Significant relative to what, and raised precisely by whom? When exactly (i.e., the dates) were these issues raised, and what was the timeline for institutional investigations and responses? Why were those concerns not explicitly indicated in the RNs?

3) Why was "compliance with ethical policies for human research" not verified during peer review, or post-peer review during editorial screening and handling, and by the publisher's management, prior to publication?

4) Why was "the integrity of the data reported in the article" not verified during peer review, or post-peer review during editorial screening and handling, and by the publisher's management, prior to publication?

5) "the authors [. . . ] were not able to provide all the necessary supporting information". What supporting information precisely was being asked of them (and thus missing)?

6) Did any of the authors object to or disagree with the retraction (Teixeira da Silva, 2024a) at the time when the RNs were issued? Conversely, did all of the authors explicitly agree with the retractions before they were issued, i.e., was there due process? Considering that email addresses only appear for the corresponding authors (CAs), that the indicated emails are mostly generic emails (possibly suggesting third party (e.g., paper mill; Candal-Pedreira et al., 2024) involvement), that authorship or the identity of authors cannot be fully verified (at least not using Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORCID)), how did the publisher contact the authors, and how did the authors respond? Admittedly, the emails of all

authors may have been added to the Journal online submission system at the time of submission, so there is no way of verifying whether the publisher had access to all authors' emails, or not, and if yes, whether they were all contacted, or only the CAs. On 16 November 2025, an email was sent to each of the nine papers' CAs requesting feedback about their papers, specifically addressing the issue of procedure, agreement/disagreement with the initial retraction, and their feeling or impression about the publisher's handling of the process. Thus far, no responses have yet been received.

7) If "verifying the validity of published work is core to the scholarly record's integrity", an aspect that was seemingly not effectively achieved for some or all of these nine papers, as the publisher claims, why then was this the authors' responsibility and why did the journal, its editors, and the publisher assume no responsibility for this verification process in these nine papers' RNs?

8) Are the Journal editorial policies and COPE guidelines sufficiently robust and efficient to deal with retractions and de-retractions? The latter is not specifically addressed by the COPE retraction guidelines, originally published in 2019 and updated in August 2025.

9) Why did the publisher erase the watermarked versions of the nine papers and their RNs? In such cases, what value is the CC BY 4.0 license that these papers have?

10) Why did the Journal editors and publisher not assume any explicit responsibility for the RNs regarding failed peer review, editorial, paper, and RN mismanagement (as perceived by this paper's author)?

11) Who exactly (i.e., which individuals) authored the RNs and PNs? Why were editors or editors-in-chief not explicitly named (Teixeira da Silva, 2025a)?

12) Why was one de-retracted paper re-retracted using a new DOI, whereas the other was issued as an HTML-based "Statement of Removal", which employed the original paper's DOI?

## Other issues of concern

In 2024, at the time of the retractions, the journal charged a hefty article publishing charge (APC) (US$2990 / £2392 / EUR2875), as indicated in the instructions for authors (IFA), which was last updated on 17 November 2021 (Bioengineered, 2024a). Presumably, the editors and peer reviewers were not remunerated, as typifies the exploitative for-profit commercial academic publishing business (Aczel et al., 2021). The IFA did not indicate in 2024 that ORCID is mandatory, which may explain why only four out of the nine CAs (or 4/44 authors) indicated one (Table 1), although three of the four ORCID accounts indicate no information about the authors while the fourth ORCID only lists the Journal paper, suggesting it was a "burner" account, emphasizing the weakness of this author identifier for practical purposes related to publishing integrity (Teixeira da Silva, 2020). None of the CAs list an institutional email, and the vast majority are of the type carrying a @126.com, @163.com, or similar email suffix. Liberal policies, or the absence of clear policies, related to ORCID and emails invite abuses of the publication system.

In March–May 2024, there was no editor-in-chief (Bioengineered, 2024b), i.e., the journal is leaderless, so it is unclear who editorially oversaw the RNs and PNs, or if these notices were managed exclusively by the publisher. In November 2025, the journal now lists an editor-in-chief. All 44 authors of the nine retracted, then de-retracted papers, are from China, and while China accounts for some of the highest ratios of retractions globally in OA journals (Wang et al., 2019), in this case, national fault and thus a drop in reputation of China – in the eyes of a reader – could not have been easily removed by these oversimplistically apologetic PNs.

In March–May 2024, the PubMed records all indicated the status of de-retracted papers as retracted (Fig. 1A), and even though it would typically only be a matter of time until records are updated, the continued status of six de-retracted papers (see **-labelled cases in Table 1, i.e., they are not retracted) as being retracted in November 2025, almost 18 months after their status had changed, reflects poorly on PubMed management and/or on the formal communication channels between the journal and its publisher on one hand, and PubMed on the other, particularly regarding the transmission of accurate and up-to-date bibliometric information. The existence of conflicting information between PubMed records and the journal's own online records, combined with a system that does not appear to support real-time updates in a time of "industrialized" retractions, only accentuates existing concerns about PubMed as an untrustworthy platform to access biomedical literature (Teixeira da Silva, 2023), suffering from poor information curation and management (Teixeira da Silva et al., 2024).

Collectively, the nine papers had accrued 32 citations until April 2024, and 39 until November 2025, according to Google Scholar (Table 1), although the retracted/de-retracted status of papers was inconsistent on this platform, where six papers were indicated as retracted in April 2024 (Fig. 1C), and now only one in November 2025 rather than two. This confused retracted status – to a lesser extent at Google Scholar (one case) but to a greater extent

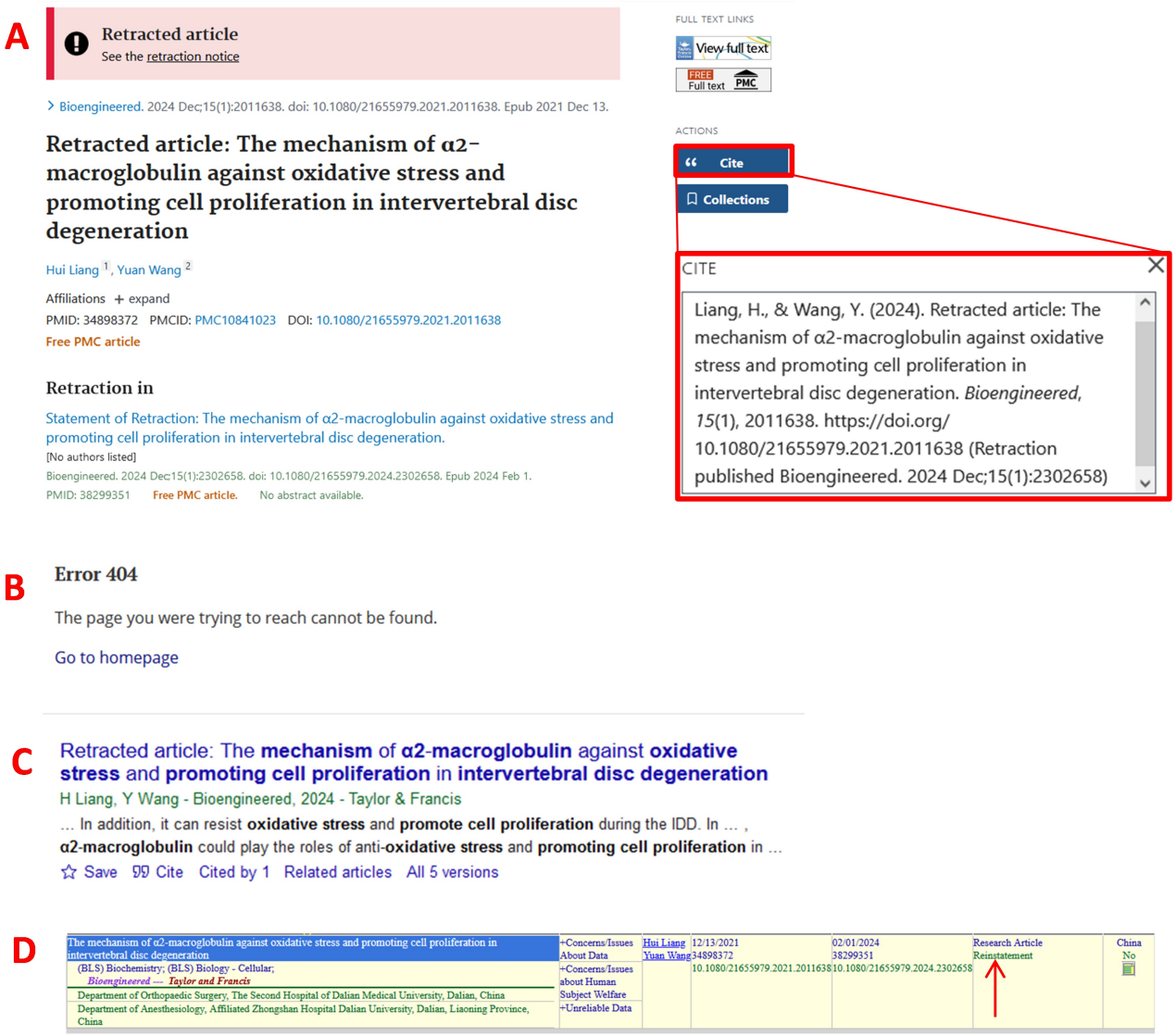


**Figure 1:** *At PubMed, the retracted status of the nine papers, which had, except for two which have been re-retracted, until 18 April 2024 been classified as de-retracted by Taylor & Francis (see two cases in Table 1), still remained as retracted (red-bordered inset indicates the citation offered by PubMed) (A). Currently (17 November 2025), six of the de-retracted papers are indexed at PubMed as being retracted (see **-labelled cases in Table 1). On the same 2024 date, even though the entry for the statement of retraction was still available at PubMed, it had been scrubbed clean at the Taylor & Francis Bioengineered website, resulting in a 404 error message (B). Until 18 April 2024, six out of nine papers were indicated as retracted at Google Scholar (C). Currently (17 November 2025), only one of the nine papers is indicated as being retracted at Google Scholar even though it should be two. The nine papers are indexed in the Retraction Watch (2025) retraction database, despite now (17 November 2025) seven of those papers not being officially retracted, although the nature of the notice indicated is "Reinstatement" (red arrow) (D). Date of screenshots: 10 March 2024. The example provided is for the first entry in Table 1 (DOI: 10.1080/21655979.2021.2011638). Sources of screenshots: https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34898372/ (A), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21655979.2024.2302658 (B), Google Scholar search (C), Retraction Watch (2025) (D).*

at PubMed (six cases) – might reduce the desire of academics to cite these papers – assuming that their scientific validity is intact – while other academics might risk citing these studies to support their own papers' claims, not knowing whether the now de-retracted papers actually contain scientific errors or other issues that were originally listed in the RNs, or not. The editorial errors by the journal and the management errors by the publisher thus not only negatively impact the bibliometric standing of these papers and their authors, but also the community of researchers who might read, cite, or rely on these papers to support their own research. When the web of knowledge surrounding a retracted paper, or a paper against which doubts have been raised, as occurred with these nine papers, is disrupted by processes like retraction, de-retraction, and then re-retraction, then there is the risk of disrupting the integrity of citing papers, and if the web is cast more widely, then trust in a field of study may also arise (Teixeira da Silva, 2024b).

Finally, a filtered search on the journal's website revealed that 3104 documents had been published, and that 62 papers had been retracted (10 March 2024) and 200 on 16 November 2025. In April 2024, all nine retracted then de-retracted papers were still indexed on the Retraction Watch (2025) database, a de facto blacklist, which listed 49 items for this journal, 40 of which were retractions. The database indicated the nine papers as being reinstated (Fig. 1D). However, if, after 18 months (17 November 2025), seven of the nine papers are no longer officially retracted, then should these papers appear on this database, and will listing the authors on this blacklist not cause the authors unfair reputational harm?

## Conclusion, limitations, and disclaimer

The mismanagement of the retractions of nine papers—followed by their subsequent de-retraction, suggesting that the retractions may not have been warranted initially, and then the re-retraction of two of those papers—handled by the journal's publishing and editorial teams, should serve as a learning experience for other journals that rely on COPE retraction guidelines (2019). Even though this case study, involving a set of nine papers, only reflects a single journal and a single publisher (i.e., size and sample limitations), there should be interest by the peer community in understanding the step-by-step procedural management and also potential mismanagement of the retraction process. If the process is not rigorously scrutinized and questioned, then one day, other authors might also find themselves in a similar unfortunate situation, and the publisher risks that some of them may unite to issue a class action lawsuit if they feel collectively disenfranchised (Teixeira da Silva, 2025b). At that time, unless there are published case studies – such as this one, which looks at the nine retractions from a historical bibliometric perspective – that critically evaluate retraction-related procedures, authors who find themselves in a situation where the retraction process has been mismanaged by the publisher, and finding themselves blacklisted on the Retraction Watch database, may simply conform to whatever "ethical" rule that is imposed upon them by COPE or whichever organization's ethical policies the publisher decides to follow. The cases were initially analyzed in April 2024, and while the final status of the nine papers had not changed in an updated assessment in November 2025, there were a number of changes, such as citation counts, indicated status at Google Scholar, PubMed or Retraction Watch, emphasizing the importance of retaining and publishing screenshot-based evidence, some of which appears in Fig. 1. Finally, the CAs of the nine papers were contacted by email on 16 November 2025 for commentary regarding their opinions regarding the editorial management and potential procedural mismanagement of their papers' retractions, de-retractions and (in two cases) re-retractions. Thus far, no responses or clarifications were received. To avoid potential professional retaliation, the publisher and editors were not contacted.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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