Sharing Information on the Responsible Conduct of Research: A Canadian Perspective

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Background

• Administrators who manage RCR processes are expected to maintain confidentiality
• Multiple privacy policies and regulations govern confidentiality in complex ways in Canada
• Sharing across international borders even more complex
• Some confidential information about RCR matters must be shared…….
Risks of Inadequate Information Sharing

• For institutions
  • Incomplete assessment of unidentified related breaches
  • Potential for inefficiency due to duplicate reviews
  • Financial risk for not identifying breaches to grant funding
  • Incomplete corrective and preventive actions
  • Inconsistent sanctions/ remedial actions
  • Inappropriate disclosure results in legal risk, contract violations and breach of privacy legislations

• For individuals
  • Damaged reputation
  • Violation of legal or contractual rights
  • Unfair or unhelpful corrective requirements

• For science and scholarship
  • Inaccurate scientific record
Survey Objective

• To summarize how Canadian institutions share information about responsible conduct of research (RCR) matters

• to extract best practices for the Canadian research community

• to identify gaps in best practices for information sharing

• to contribute to the international discussion on sharing information related to the responsible conduct of research
Method

- **Survey:** 26 question, online survey conducted in Fall 2018

- **Survey Focus:** Content of policies at Canadian institutions related to sharing information about allegations and findings regarding the responsible conduct of research

- **Survey Respondents:** Person with primary responsibility for administering the institution’s RCR policy

- **Survey designers:**
  - 7 professionals who work on responsible conduct of research at their institutions
  - Group convened by the Canadian Secretariat on Responsible Conduct of Research
80% of survey respondents stated they were the usual contact person for RCR.
How Institutions Govern Confidentiality

Are there formal guidelines for managing confidentiality of RCR matters?

- NO: 9.7%
- SOME: 46.8%
- YES: 43.5%

How does your institution manage confidentiality of process and procedures related to RCR matters?

- Not Systematic: 11.3%
- Systematic Verbal: 19.4%
- Systematic Written: 41.9%
- Verbal and Written: 8.9%
- Other: 18.5%
Who Sees the Allegations?

- 61%: Senior Administrator is the contact person
- 72%: 1 or 2 other senior administrators also must see the allegation but...
- 28% of policies designate 3 to 7 others
- 51%: some or complete discretion allowed as to who else knows
- **Practice** is that senior administrators, lawyers or unit heads are informed
  - 83%: inform at least another 5 people in writing of the allegation. .... another 17% inform up to 9 people in writing
When Must the Respondent be Informed of the Allegation?

- 49%: 0 to 10 days
- 23%: 10 to 30 days
- 3%: more than 30 days
- 24%: no time frame specified
Who Sees the Findings of the Initial Inquiry?

• **48%**: some or complete discretion allowed when the initial inquiry showed **NO** breach occurred

• **46%**: some or complete discretion allowed when the initial inquiry showed **YES** breach occurred

• Practice: **89%** inform at least 6 people in writing of the result of the inquiry and .... another **11%** inform up to 10 people in writing

  • Generally inform senior administrators, lawyers or unit heads
  • 50% also mention external bodies, such as funding agencies and journals
Who Sees the Findings of an Investigation?

• 52%: Some or complete discretion allowed as to who knows irrespective of whether NO breach or YES breach is found

• Practice: About 4 people; especially, senior administrators, unit heads, external bodies are told when NO breach has occurred

• Practice: About 5 people; especially, senior administrators, unit heads, external bodies are told when YES breach has occurred
What Percentage of Policies Require Findings to be Provided to Respondents and Complainants in Writing?

- Respondents
  - 66% Findings of the Initial inquiry
  - 57% Findings of the Investigation

- Complainants
  - 58% Findings of the Initial Inquiry
  - 40% Findings of the Investigation
Are there policy guidelines for sharing information with another institution when the allegation concerns a co-authored paper, shared grant, etc.?

- No: 64
- Some: 23
- Yes: 14
Information Sharing Practices Across Institutions

• Only 25% of respondents had encountered this situation (i.e. 31 institutions)
  • 71% : Shared allegations
  • 58% : Shared process and findings
  • 3% : Other information (e.g., sanctions)

• Who decided what was shared varied greatly
  • 55% of institutions consulted 2 or 3 people

• 77% : Information was shared verbally and in writing
Does your Institution have Policy Guidelines about Interacting with the Media about RCR Matters?

**Percentages**

- **No Guidelines**: 70%
- **Generic Guidelines**: 18%
- **Comprehensive Guidelines**: 12%

No Guidelines: **policies**
• Most Canadian institutions have formal guidelines and systematic procedures for sharing information on RCR matters
  • However, many policies allow considerable discretion about who is informed and it appears that 6 to 10 people know about even unexamined allegations
  • Whether everyone who is informed about an allegation eventually is informed about the findings is unclear from our survey
  • Information sharing outside of the institution (i.e., with other institutions or with the media) is not systematically addressed in most policies
  • Timelines and requirement to have written interactions with respondents and complainants vary across institutions
Gaps in Current Policies

• All institutions should have a systematic approach to information sharing

• Local requirements related to other collective agreement or employment law may need to be considered

• Institutions should have clear statements about sharing information related to RCR matters within and outside
  • Respondent must be informed (whether in writing or verbal may depend)
  • Whether complainants are informed may depend on whether they are directly affected
  • Other institutions may need to be engaged and shared processes may be needed, which requires processes and will be especially complex across countries
  • Journals need to be contacted to correct the research record
  • Media responses are part of a more complex set of institutions and legal considerations
Limitations and Future Directions

• Institutional Staff often have access to information on RCR matters and our survey did not ask about Staff

• Our survey did not ask about real or potential conflicts that exist in the multiple policies, laws and employment documents that pertain to handling complex RCR matters