

**Selected references from Prescrire's literature search**

**1-** Prescrire Editorial Staff "Impending changes to European pharmaceutical regulations. Part I. Civil society's analysis of the Commission's proposals: major changes ahead, improvements needed" *Prescrire Int* 2022; **31** (243): 302-304.

**2-** Prescrire Editorial Staff "Impending changes to European pharmaceutical regulations. Part II. The European Parliamentary Research Service in favour of a European Medicines Infrastructure" *Prescrire Int* 2023; **32** (244): 23-25.

**3-** Prescrire Editorial Staff "European pharmaceutical legislation: too many opportunities missed" *Prescrire Int* 2024; **33** (264): 255.

**4-** Prescrire Editorial Staff "Revision of European pharmaceutical legislation: a disappointing vote in the Parliament" *Prescrire Int* 2024; **33** (264): 278-279.

**5-** Panel for the Future of Science and Technology "Improving access to medicines and promoting pharmaceutical innovation" November 2023: 107 pages.

**6-** Kuipers E "Towards needs-driven innovation and healthcare policies" *Eurohealth* 2023; **29** (3): 12. World Health Organization. Regional Office for Europe. <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/375422>.

## Too many scientific articles continue to be cited after their retraction

- About 60 out of 100 000 articles are retracted after publication. Unfortunately, those who read or cite them are not always aware of their retracted status.

**H**as the scientific article that you were about to read been retracted by the journal or the authors who originally published it? While the likelihood of this occurring may be low, it is on the rise. A study has found that between 1985 and 2014, the retraction rate of scientific articles increased from about 4 to 60 per 100 000 published articles (1). Another study has shown that between 2000 and 2020, the retraction rate increased from 11 to 45 per 100 000 articles for publications with a corresponding author affiliated with a European institution (2). And as the authors of the first study observe, too often these articles continue to be cited with no reference to their retracted status. This includes publications based on data produced through scientific misconduct, which was the most common reason for retracting articles in the fields of biology and medicine in 2020 (1).

In their discussion of the causes of this phenomenon, the authors note that many articles remain accessible with no reference to

their retraction. Firstly, journal publishers do not always correctly identify retracted articles on their websites. Although the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) has issued guidelines to help them do so, these recommendations still need to be applied. Secondly, scientific articles are often available from a range of different online platforms, including preprint servers (in advance of potential acceptance post-peer review), bibliographic databases and publishers' websites (1).

In April 2021, the study authors selected 500 retracted articles from the PubMed database and checked whether they were properly identified as having been retracted in the Web of Science, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Scopus and Sci-Hub databases, and on publishers' websites. The proportion of articles not identified as having been retracted ranged from between 25% to 70%, depending on the database. The highest non-identification rate was found in Sci-Hub, which is used extensively in low-income countries (1).

A resource specifically dedicated to listing retracted articles does exist, however: the Retraction Watch Database. This database can also be consulted by reference management software such as EndNote<sup>°</sup> and Zotero<sup>°</sup> to automatically warn users if an article listed in their digital library has been retracted (1,3).

The authors conclude by calling on the entire scientific publishing community to commit to improving the situation, in order to ensure that data from retracted articles are no longer used to inform healthcare decisions (1).

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**References** **1-** Boudry C et al. "Poor visibility of retracted articles: a problem that should no longer be ignored" *BMJ* 2023; 381: e072929, 4 pages.

**2-** Freijedo-Farinás et al. "Biomedical retractions due to misconduct in Europe: characterization and trends in the last 20 years" *Scientometrics* 2024; 129: 2867-2882. **3-** Prescrire Editorial Staff "Queries and Comments - Retraction of a published article: what are the consequences for evaluation data?" *Prescrire Int* 2023; 32 (247): 108-110.