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Guidelines, recommendations, position papers and experts' opinions — should we establish rules for creating rules?

For some time now, a growing number of publications presenting experts' opinions or position papers on various diagnostic and therapeutic aspects have appeared in numerous scientific journals in our country. From the beginning of 2020 to the present, i.e. during the last 30 months, 33 articles classified by the editors as expert opinion or position paper have been published in three leading Polish cardiology journals: Polish Heart Journal, Cardiology Journal and Advances in Interventional Cardiology [1–33]. Such opulence of publications proves high activity of our community and may be regarded as a reason to be proud. Nevertheless, with independent work of unallied teams of experts, inconsistencies are difficult to avoid, often raising doubts and causing confusion among the readers.

This phenomenon embarrasses me as an initiator, co-author and reviewer of such documents, as well as the Editor-in-Chief of the Medical Research Journal and the Section Editor of the Cardiology Journal. The creation of these, otherwise extraordinarily important documents, transitioning science into clinical practice, requires considerable effort and genuine commitment of many people. However, the excessive number of documents of this sort and the lack of coordination in their creation leads to devaluation of their merit value and attenuation of their impact across the cardiology community. Moreover, contrary to the authors' intentions, instead of providing a clear order for the rules of conduct, information chaos may arise. Therefore, a number of issues regarding such publications require clarification.

1. In particular, it seems important to determine whether it is permissible at all to publish positions that contradict the documents of the European Society of Cardiology?

2. Moreover, should the contents of such documents take into account or refer to other same-themed articles published in Polish journals?
3. Finally, is it acceptable to publish experts' opinions or position papers plainly summarizing other official documents, e.g. the guidelines of the European Society of Cardiology, rather than adding new scientific contents?

I am sharing my dilemmas with you as I believe that there is an urgent need to establish a unified policy regarding publication of such documents. Referring to the issues outlined above:

1. Personally, I am convinced that open criticism and taking a different position is acceptable, as long as it is substantively justified and the scope of non-compliance is clearly defined. Therefore, neither editorial offices nor reviewers should require such compliance.
2. In my opinion, when topic-of-publication overlap is the case, it is absolutely necessary to refer to previously published positions derived from official institutions e.g. scientific societies, particularly the Polish Society of Cardiology (PSC) or other official bodies.
3. While, there is nothing inappropriate with popularizing and emphasizing the importance of such documents, the fact of a publication being a summary, not a new original document, should be clearly stated in the title.

Certainly, no limits should be put to expressing opinions, but it seems that we ought to launch an extensive discussion on the principles of publishing experts' opinions or position papers. The PSC is perceived by most of the domestic cardiologists not only as a scien-

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 Medical Research Journal 2022; Volume 7, Number 2, 105–107; 10.5603/MRJ.2022.0029; Copyright © 2022 Via Medica; ISSN 2451-2591; e-ISSN 2451-4101

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tific society, but also as a representative and exponent of community opinions. The extremely important role and efforts of the Guidelines Committee of PSC, chaired by prof. Agnieszka Tycińska, aimed to maintain the high quality of documents published in the *Kardiologia Polska* should be emphasized. It is obvious to me that even the PSC cannot impose fully universal rules that apply to everyone. The more so because many of the topics discussed by the authors of recommendations or opinions are also of interest to other scientific societies. However, I find it possible to create a declaration of principles of good practice for the creation and publication of such documents. Leaving the decision whether to incorporate or not these principles to the discretion of scientific journals' Editors-in-Chief, the journals' final choice should be announced by the PSC, creating a clear message for the readers regarding publication policies of specific journals.

I believe that I am not alone with my doubts and that many of the readers share similar dilemmas. I count for this discussion to be continued.

Acknowledgments: *I would like to thank all the outstanding representatives of the Polish cardiology community who responded to my letter of April 1, 2022, sharing their opinions on the topics discussed in the above text: Stanisław Bartuś, Andrzej Budaj, Agnieszka Kapton-Cieślicka, Robert Gil, Michał Hawranek, Miłosz Jaguszewki, Aldona Kubica, Przemysław Mitkowski, Agnieszka Tycińska, Anetta Undas, Adam Witkowski, Robert Zymliński.*

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