
Media reports: call for a working party is unrealistic

SIR — The call, made in your Editorial “Responding to uncertainty” (*Nature* 437, 1; 2005), for learned societies to create fast-acting working parties to respond to sensational news stories arising from journals, is unrealistic in the United Kingdom.

Having worked in and with UK biological learned societies for a couple of decades, including a term as a member of the Council for the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers, I can testify that the vast majority simply do not have the resources to implement this suggestion. Further, their members have full-time commitments and so would find it difficult to attend such working parties at short notice.

The best that might be achieved would be for those societies that publish journals to call upon their editorial boards to justify the decision to publish, and to clarify any uncertainty arising out of media reporting. However, even this would not be applicable to all cases: for instance, the example you cite of the MMR vaccine would not be covered as *The Lancet* is produced by a publishing house and not a learned society.

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