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Statement of the board of German Society of Legal Medicine (DGRM) and the University Forensic Genetics Working Group (UFG) on the suppression of *Forensic Science International: Genetics (FSI Genetics)* from JCR 2019

Dear Mrs. Bourke-Waite and Mrs. Hollingswort,

the board of German Society of Legal Medicine and the University Forensic Genetics Working Group have been informed that Clarivate™ decided to suppress *Forensic Science International – Genetics* from the Web of Science Journal Citation Reports™ (JCR), disqualifying the journal from having its 2019 Journal Impact Factor (JIF) due to a high percentage of self-citations.

This information came as a great surprise to us, since to the best of our knowledge and belief we had not received any warning before.

We believe that this assumption is incorrect for *FSI Genetics* because of the following reasons: Forensic genetics is a highly specialized field that plays a crucial role in society, securing legal and scientific evidence in criminal cases related to sexual assault, robbery, aggression or murder, but also in various other areas such as investigation of terrorist attacks, paternity testing and identification of missing persons as a result of armed conflict and human rights violations, as well as helping to clarify and establish the truth of historical facts.

The suppression of such a "niche" journal is harmful not only for publishers, authors, editors and reviewers but also for the research area itself. We are also concerned that this decision may have serious consequences for the forensic genetics community and the further development of this field. Last year's removal of this journal from JCR is problematic for the majority of researchers. We fear that this will lead inevitably to a delay in scientific research development. Ongoing research in our highly specialized field is of utmost importance not only for research groups but also for law enforcement and criminal justice.

The field of forensic genetics has undergone a rapid development in recent years and has achieved remarkable progress. The separation of the journal *FSI Genetics* from *FSI* reflects the current research and development trends in this discipline. The journal *FSI Genetics* has been at the

forefront of the development of forensic science, and its excellent publications have led to a continuous expansion of the Impact Factor.

One important reason for the high level of self-citation compared to other journals is the very specific field of knowledge and research of forensic genetics. There is a lack of diversity in the publication of journals in this discipline. Articles with the most relevant and novel research are commonly published in *FSI Genetics*. Subsequently, these studies are frequently cited due to their high impact within the forensic community.

It should be noted that the JCR data shows that the percentage of self-citations of *FSI Genetics* in 2019 has the lowest rate since 2014 and has decreased by 20% in the last five years. Therefore, it is incomprehensible for us why the impact of *FSI Genetics* is set to 0 right now.

We agree with Clarivate™ that deliberate self-citing in order to manipulate the JIF would be unethical and unscientific. We believe that self-citation is something that the magazine must deal with in an appropriate manner in this regard. The Editorial Board of *FSI Genetics* already recognized the problem and took various measures to avoid a high level of self-citation. For example, a section for forensic genetics was established in the independent journal *Forensic Science International*. Furthermore, a new journal was introduced (*Forensic Science International: Reports*), which accepts e.g. forensic genetic population studies. In addition, the journal *FSI Genetics* was deliberately opened to related fields such as forensic molecular pathology.

We strongly believe that Clarivate's decision is inappropriate because they are not considering the special circumstances of *FSI Genetics*, being the only journal exclusively publishing articles in a small and highly specialized field of research and applied science. Suppression of a journal, regarding the previous year and without any kind of warning, is an extremely detrimental situation for researchers who worked hard to publish their work in the journal with more impact in the area, unknowing its dangerous situation regarding JCR.

We would like to point out that the journal is on the right path with regard to self-citation and we would highly appreciate and welcome a dialogue between Clarivate™ and the Editorial Board of *FSI Genetics* to clarify the situation and agree on measures e.g. to reduce self-citation. For these reasons, we kindly ask Clarivate™ to consider the position in this matter and review the decision on suppression of the journal *Forensic Science International: Genetics*.

Best regards,

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