

To: Presidents of Iranian Medical Universities

As you are fully aware, observing principles and rules of research ethics is one of the most important foundations of research in established scientific systems, and compliance with such standards would be required at all stages of a research, from designing a research proposal, conducting as a clinical trial or the like, and finally publishing the results through research articles. Today, observing ethical standards is the least expectation from scientific institutions, such as universities and bodies supporting research, since the scientific standing and academic prestige of such institutes gravely depends on their ethical performance. Therefore, all prestigious countries and scientific institutes invest extensively to minimize research violations in the activities and projects under their supervision, and safeguard their reputation, while at the same time enjoying a "clean research environment". Respecting research ethics standards is surely the most valuable symbolic asset of a scientific institute or university, winning researchers' confidence to promote its scientific indices, through the number of references to the articles and works published by the related researchers, as well as attracting economic and human capitals.

For this purpose and considering the fact that special attention has been paid to ethics in the recommendations of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran in regard to science and technology, and the general health policies of the country, while the Supreme Leader has also emphasized the need to safeguard research ethical territories, and to respond gravely to unacceptable conducts such as thesis sales and the like that seriously threaten our national scientific prestige, measures need to be designed and implemented to eliminate such destructive actions through prevention and punishment of violators. Although the practical and experimental nature of most medical research lowers the probability of such offenses in comparison to other fields of study (especially the humanities), we would like to ask you to kindly take the required measures to communicate the following to the relevant departments and officials, particularly faculty members and relevant executives, for their information and implementation:

١. The full responsibility for compliance with relevant ethical standards in all research projects rests with the lead researcher. Negligence or violation by other members of the research team, even without the lead researcher being aware, would be held against the violator, yet it would not relieve the responsibility of the lead researcher. Similarly, the principal responsibility for compliance with ethical standards in student theses rests with the advising and reading professors involved, and possible violations by the related students would not relieve the mentioned professors of their responsibility in this respect. Hence, it is emphatically recommended that the respectable professors precisely and closely supervise the whole process of the research.
٢. Considering that most research violations occur in theoretical theses conducted with library-based methods, it is emphatically recommended that except for special cases approved by the research council or postgraduate studies council of the university, library-based theses not be accepted to the extent possible for students at all levels, including master's, professional doctoral, specialized doctoral, post-doctoral and PhD levels.
٣. Proposal defense sessions are imperative for all students preparing theses of any type (including master's, PhD, professional doctoral, specialized doctoral, and post-doctoral levels).
٤. Periodical progress reports on thesis projects are suitable solutions for minimizing the probability of research violations, and it is therefore recommended that such reports be earnestly demanded of the students preparing theses, especially at the PhD level.
٥. For all students requiring a grade for their thesis, and graduates of different postgraduate levels, including master's, professional doctoral, specialized doctoral, post-doctoral and PhD levels, thesis defense sessions need to be held in the standard manner, and preferably with the participation of an external judge. Thesis judges are thus responsible to ensure theses are standard and original, and to proceed to sign the minutes of the mentioned session and other required documents and certificates.
٦. For articles extracted from theses, the advising and reading professors need to consider and approve the whole content before accepting or publishing the

article, or proceed to halt the process if any problems were observed. In case of any ethical problems in published or accepted articles extracted from theses awaiting their defense sessions, the advising and reading professors are fully responsible for compliance with ethical standards, for no thesis with ethical non-conformities in the extracted article shall be allowed defense until satisfactory resolution of all ethical problems.

۷. Advising and reading professors, judges and the postgraduate studies councils of universities, faculties and research-education institutes are required to immediately inform the ethics committee of the related university if they encounter any research violations, especially in the theses. Upon receiving violation reports, the research ethics committees in Research and Technology Department of universities need to consider the issue in accordance with the related guidelines, as well as the guideline passing through the final preparation stages at the time being. If the violation is proved, the committee involved will follow the research violation case as plaintiff, while taking all necessary measures to support the reporting officials or bodies.
۸. As per established research principles, extracting articles from theses should be conducted by the lead author (recommended by relevant standards to be the advising professor of the research), in cooperation with associate authors. Therefore, having institutes or companies commercially extract articles from theses instead of the student is construed as a violation of research ethics standards, and not acceptable or encouraged under any circumstances. It must be mentioned that seeking the assistance of such institutes or companies is permissible if limited to services such as text edition, etc.
۹. In accordance with the present regulations, all research conducted in medical universities require the approval of research ethics committees, which should approve the proposal and supervise the research process. This requirement also applies to theses at postgraduate, professional doctoral, specialized doctoral and post-doctorate levels.

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