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To the editor:

The “academic cartel”: another pernicious weed in the field of academic medicine

In his timely editorial,1 Dr Kaushansky articulates his concerns about the various forms of research misconduct that, as he pointed out, are certainly on the increase. He considers certain types of misconduct pernicious. I would like to bring attention to another form of misconduct that has not received much attention in the scientific arena but that is, nevertheless, a pernicious development: the “academic cartel.” This is analogous to the industrial, financial, and drug cartels that use devious techniques to promote their products and to sabotage or destroy their opponents. A handful of academics and institutions decide that a particular subject or area of research is “their domain” and make conscious and conceited efforts to propagate and promote their points of view while dismissing or suppressing any differing views. They assume a self-appointed “expert” role in the area of their interest to disseminate their views. Unfortunately, these alleged experts are very often asked to referee scientific work generated by others working in their domain. Consequently, the articles supporting their point of view are accepted and published often with fantastic proclamations (“breakthrough,” “revolutionary,” “cutting edge,” etc.) while suppressing works that differ from or challenge their views. In my opinion, this is pernicious and deleterious to scientific and medical research in general, especially if the subject matter has an important public health (for example, blood transfusion medicine) or clinical implication. I think it is the responsibility of the editors of various high-impact journals, which I think includes Blood, to be aware of this practice and to choose appropriate referees to review articles submitted. I also think that editors should be made accountable if they fail to curb this practice of prejudiced publication.

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Reference

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