

Site plagiarizes blog posts, then files DMCA takedown on originals

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Content

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A quick glance at NewsBulet.In...

A dizzying story that involves falsified medical research, plagiarism, and legal threats came to light via a DMCA takedown notice today. [Retraction Watch](#), a site that followed (among many other issues) the implosion of a Duke cancer researcher's career, found many of its articles on the topic pulled by WordPress, its host. The reason? A small site based in India apparently copied all of the posts, claimed them as their own, and then filed a DMCA takedown notice to get the originals pulled from their source. As of now, the originals are still missing as their actual owners seek to have them restored.

Watching the retractions

The Retraction Watch blog is run by Ivan Oransky, the executive editor at Reuters Health, and Adam Marcus, the managing editor of *Anesthesiology News*. Working in the field of medical reporting, they began to realize cases of erroneous or falsified research were often pulled from the scientific record with little notice, leaving the research community with little idea which, if any,

aspects of the original report could be relied on. So they started to track the retraction of scientific papers on a blog they set up.

Their timing was impressive. Various studies indicated that research fraud was [increasing dramatically](#), and the site helped chronicle some prominent cases of fraud, including the career collapse of the [current record holder](#) for making up data.

One of the cases they followed was Anil Potti, a cancer researcher who worked at Duke University at the time. Potti first fell under scrutiny for embellishing his resume, but the investigation quickly expanded as broader questions were raised about his research. As the investigation continued, a number of Potti's papers ended up being retracted as accusations of falsified data were raised. Eventually, three clinical trials that were started based on Potti's data were [stopped entirely](#). Although federal investigations of Potti's conduct are still in progress, he eventually [resigned from Duke](#).

In all, Retraction Watch published 22 stories on the implosion of Potti's career. In fact, three of the top four Google results for his name all point to the Retraction Watch blog (the fourth is his Wikipedia entry). Despite the widespread attention to his misbehavior, Potti managed to get a position at the University of North Dakota (where he worked earlier in his career). Meanwhile, he [hired a reputation management company](#), which dutifully went about creating websites with glowing things to say about the doctor.

Down go the posts

This morning, however, 10 of the Retraction Watch posts vanished. An [e-mail Oransky received](#) explained why: someone from "Utter [sic] Pradesh" named Narendra Chatwal claimed to be a senior editor at NewsBulet.In, "a famous news firm in India." Chatwal said the site only publishes work that is "individually researched by our reporters," yet duplicates of some of the site's material appeared on Retraction Watch. Therefore, to protect his copyright, he asked that the WordPress host pull the material. It complied.

There are a large number of reasons to doubt this story. As Oransky told Ars, "Whols says the offending site didn't exist until after we'd posted nine of the allegedly plagiarized posts." And he noted one of the commenters at the site pointed out one of the supposedly plagiarized pieces [visible on the News Bullet site](#) refers to "Ivan's Reuters colleagues." The style of writing and format of the stories in question should also be very familiar to regular Retraction Watch readers.

A quick look at a number of other posts on the site also shows Chatwal's claims of original reporting are bogus. Simple Google searches show that sentences of the material appear at a variety of other outlets. (See, for example, [this story](#), which is apparently a direct copy of a [Indo Asian News Service article](#).)

This is the latest in a long line of [spurious DMCA takedowns](#), but it's the first that Oransky and Marcus have dealt with (Oransky said they've had a single cease-and-desist letter about a copyrighted image). They've seen their own material re-posted elsewhere but have not done anything about it. "We haven't taken any action against anyone, because that would probably take more time than just keeping up with retractions," Oransky told Ars. For now, he said he's simply

talked to Quinn Heraty, a lawyer with some copyright experience. She pointed him to an automated [DMCA counter-notice generator](#), which he has used to try to get the posts restored.

The remarkable specificity of the request, with all the material focused on a single researcher, is worrisome. "Potti has never responded to our e-mails or phone calls," Oransky said. "Neither has anyone claiming to represent him." It's possible that Potti, who was born in India, might have a special resonance for the local news. But the site looks poorly put together and contains mostly duplicated material—there's very little evidence of that level of attention being paid to details of local interest.

For his part, Oransky is hoping that it's just coincidence. "We can only hope that this isn't an attempt to keep us from reporting on retractions and scientific fraud."

This post has been edited to correct an error in the total number of posts published on Potti by Retraction Watch.

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