Retracting, Replacing, and Correcting the Literature for Pervasive Error in Which the Results Change but the Underlying Science Is Still Reliable

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In this issue of JAMA Psychiatry, Lopes and colleagues1 requested retraction and replacement of their article titled “Gamma Ventral Capsulotomy for Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder: A Randomized Clinical Trial.”2 After an error was discovered by Baethge,3 as also reported in a letter herein, the authors reviewed the data and confirmed an important but inadvertent error had occurred. As the authors explain in their letter to the editor,1 this error involved a miscomputation of a treatment response for 1 of the 8 trial participants in the treatment group. This error resulted in an erroneous Yale-Brown Obsessive-Compulsive Scale score of 36 instead of 30 for that participant, which the authors counted as a responder to the treatment rather than a nonresponder. Thus, the number of responders in the treatment group at 12 months (as per the primary outcome reported in the trial protocol) is 2 of 8 participants rather than the originally reported 3 of 8 participants.

Because of this error, the authors reconstituted the analysis and provided a corrected article with corrections to the Abstract; Results, Discussion, and Conclusions sections of the article; and relevant tables and figures in the article and online supplement. The authors have confirmed that there are no additional errors. The corrected article has been reviewed and we have confirmed that the primary outcome has changed as stated in the corrected article: “Two of 8 patients randomized to active treatment responded at 12 months, and none of the 8 sham-GVC patients responded (the absolute difference was not statistically significant: 0.25; 95% CI, 0.05-0.55; P = .11).”2

Retractions are typically reserved for articles that have resulted from scientific misconduct, such as fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism, or from pervasive error for which the results cannot be substantiated.4-6 In scientific publication, a pervasive error could result from a coding problem or a miscalculation and results in extensive inaccuracies throughout an article (eg, abstract, methods, results, discussion, conclusions, tables, and figures). Publication of pervasive incorrect data resulting in a major change in the direction or significance of the results, interpretations, and conclusions, as occurred with the trial reported by Lopes et al,2 is a serious matter. However, in this case, the error was inadvertent and the underlying science is still reliable and important. Thus, we now publish this notice of retraction and replacement with explanation from the authors1 and a corrected replacement article2 as we believe it is important for readers, investigators, and clinicians to have access to correct results of this trial. We have included a version of the original retracted article showing the original errors and a version of the replacement article showing what was corrected in the online supplement of the corrected replacement article.2

REFERENCES
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