EASE-Forum Digest: December 2017 – March 2018

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Recruitment criteria vs inclusion criteria

Michael Altus was editing a manuscript which stated the main recruitment criterion for participation in the study but gave no inclusion criteria, as he believed should be given when reporting a clinical trial. Noting that The US National Library of Medicine ClinicalTrials.gov Glossary of Common Site Terms[1] defines inclusion criteria as "the reasons that a person is allowed to participate in a clinical study" but does not define "recruitment criterion," he wondered what the difference between the two terms might be.

The consensus answer was that recruiting participants means asking them to take part but they may not meet the inclusion criteria on more detailed enquiry. Thus, the inclusion criteria should be stated in the manuscript.

Handling candidates for article-reviewer

Carol Norris asked an interesting question. In her classes on preparing manuscripts and submitting them to medical journals she advised her students to provide the email addresses and telephone numbers of any reviewers they suggested for the paper on submission. As journals normally required permission for inclusion in the acknowledgement section of papers, should not the authors also obtain permission from such potential reviewers? Again, there was a consensus answer: it is not necessary to seek permission, but different reasons for this view were given. Foppe de Mil said permission was not needed because reviewer email addresses could be found in the public domain. Duncan Nicholas thought asking permission should be avoided because it would set up a discourse between the author and reviewer creating scope for a conflict of interest and bias.

A number of EASEers joined in the discussion. Sylwia Ufnalska and Ana Marušić were concerned that email addresses provided by the author might be incorrect or even bogus leading back to the author, as has been known to happen. Editors should always check the validity of the addresses provided. Foppe added that he would never use a suggested reviewer because they might be a friend of the authors. Indeed, Duncan felt the chances were that any author who could provide an email address would be acquainted with and have corresponded with the reviewer in the past, hence again a potential conflict of interest. Ivana Štětinová only used suggested reviewers if all other possibilities had been exhausted—but there would never be a guarantee that a paper will be reviewed honestly. Eva Baranyi had experienced suggested reviewers who had sent favourable but scant reviews within 48 hours but also ones who were perfect experts. She cautioned editors not to generalize but engage their sixth sense when deciding to use suggested reviewers.

Duncan preferred to set up his journals without 'Suggested Reviewers' as a requirement. If the journal insisted on such a requirement he only provided a name field for the reviewer. He also considered that the onus of searching for email addresses should be on the editorial office, who should be checking them anyway, rather than the authors who are already overburdened by the submission process. As an aside, Duncan highlighted an irritation that ScholarOne and Editorial Manager don't match suggested reviewers with existing reviewers in their database, so the suggested reviewer fields are prone to adding errors and superfluous content into the databases.

Eva had also observed that authors often suggested reviewers in their own country. Ivana's journal's policy was to find reviewers from outside the author's country. For logistic reasons, Josephine Sciortino tended to use US-based reviewers because their email addresses were easier to find in the Internet. This led Pippa Smart to contribute some recent research she had undertaken which "found a correlation between the location of reviewers and the editors (presumably through networking associations) and also with the location of the author - and that reviewers in the region/country of the author are more likely to accept invitations to review, and those articles are more likely to be published (indicating more favourable reviews). The research also uncovered evidence that many editors default to selecting US-based reviewers, which may be why these (presumably over-burdened) reviewers so often say no." The paper has been published in *Learned Publishing*[2], which is a subscription journal but Pippa would be prepared to share it with individuals on request.

Length of editorship

Richard Loch wondered if publishers were introducing a norm or standard length of time for an editor to serve as a new metric with a view to increasing rotation for editors. In his experience, an editor's term had normally been decided on a case-for-case basis on such grounds as whether the journal was flourishing and, when extending the term, whether the editor had been active and feedback from authors, reviewers and readers.

Pippa was the only participant to take up this thread but she provided a comprehensive answer. "A tenure of 3 or 5 years with an extension of a further 3 or 5 is the most common in western (commercial) journals, and indefinite tenure more common in other regions of the world." She favoured the 3/5-year term to bring new ideas and ensure busy candidates were not put off by the prospect of being "doomed for life" to be the editor.

A limited term, she said, has several benefits such as allowing a publisher to replace a poor editor without offending them, and the editor to step down without upsetting the publisher. Also, such is human nature that there is a tendency to be enthusiastic at the start of a task, good at it for a short period, then become either complacent or biased (as she believed was typified by politicians!).

Hence, a journal might suffer from decisions made later during a longer term of involvement.

As Richard had asked for examples of editors serving long terms, Pippa listed editors who were staff members: Richard Horton, *Lancet* (appointed 1992), Fiona Godlee, *British Medical Journal* (appointed 2005) and Philip Campbell who was stepping down as Editor of *Nature* after 22 years.

Usage concerns: 'rainfall pulses' and 'fertilization' and negative exponents paired with non-SI units

Yateen Joshi was unsure about the term 'rainfall pulses.' Was the term, even though found in research papers, idiomatic? Would 'spells of rainfall' or 'rainfall events' be more correct? Sylwia had never used 'rainfall pulses,' and results of her Ngram search suggested the phrase 'rainfall events' was used more frequently in books. My insight into the need to debate these phrases is that both are 'scientific' concoctions. Is this not simply 'during rainfall' in plain English?

A second term that troubled Yateen was 'fertilization.' Could it be used to mean 'application of fertilizers'? Rod Hunt thought fertilization should be discouraged as a substitute for 'application of fertilizers' but descriptive phrases such as 'nitrogen fertilization' were acceptable.

Finally, Yateen asked if negative exponents common in such expressions as grams per litre (g L^{-1}), kilometres per hour (km h^{-1}) could be paired with such words as plant, plot and fruit. Taking the plant example, Ivana thought it was best to stick with 'per plant' rather than to write $plant^{-1}$.

Changing the corresponding author after publication

After Pippa had published an article in her journal the corresponding author asked her to substitute another corresponding author. The reason given was that the other author could better deal with queries in the English language. On the assumption that all the other authors consented to the change would an erratum be called for or could the change just be made online?

Ksenija Bazdaric pointed out that the COPE flowcharts[3] prescribe a correction should be published when adding another author after publication but Pippa's case was different.

The forum was unanimous that the change could not simply be made online. Furthermore, the original author was not named by mistake and publication of an erratum should be confined to more serious reasons involving the scientific content of the article. The authors should have discussed this before the publication and they alone should deal with any afterthoughts they may have. They could easily resolve the problem by diverting the correspondence to the author with English proficiency.

Erick García was anyway not sure if the issue was as simple as just changing the corresponding author. He had never encountered a situation in which the corresponding author was not the leader of the team, ie the principal investigator. Ksenija also made the point that being a corresponding author often carries more weight with tenure committees (and there is empirical evidence for this[4]).

Hervé Maisonneuve explained that in France "the main research institute Inserm has a bibliometric department. For internal use and in order to evaluate research teams, they calculate many indicators. They built their indicators, and to assess publication, they use three authors' positions for a paper: first, last and corresponding. Being corresponding author allocates some credit, when they compare research teams. Most of the corresponding authors are first or last authors, but in some cases, corresponding is not first or last: then it's taken into account in the assessment process."

Andrew Davis took a novel view. There should be two separate roles:

- a 'corresponding author' who guided the manuscript through publication and liaised between the coauthors and journal editor during submission, revision and publication
- an 'author for correspondence' who answered queries about the paper after it has been published.

He considered that as these roles required different skills they should normally be performed by different people: "An author for correspondence needs stability of location and legal access to information, materials and data. A corresponding author doesn't need these but should be a good diplomat and be able to correspond with the journal editor well in an appropriate language. (Diplomacy and linguistic ability are even more valuable if the coauthorship team is multisite and multilingual.)"

Changing the 'corresponding author' before final publication could be a sign of disputes between the coauthors, an editor should not agree to this unless written agreement from the authors is provided. Changing the 'corresponding author' after final publication could not be allowed as the corresponding author's role had been completed. Changing the 'author for correspondence' should not be a problem unless the paper had already been published on paper, when a change could not be made and, as already stated, the authors would have to sort out the problem themselves.

Duncan considered that the scope for these distinctions already existed, eg Journals that use ScholarOne or Editorial Manager have defined the two roles. "When submitting a paper, the user can define a 'Submitting Author' and a 'Corresponding Author' – they can be the same person or the submitting author can mark one of their co-authors as the Corresponding Author. During the peer review process, all emails are sent to the Submitting Author… The 'Corresponding Author' doesn't actually get used during the peer review process for any emails relating to that. The Corresponding Author details will likely be on the title page of the paper, which makes it relatively easy (as much as possible) to tell whether a different person should have been defined as the Corresponding Author in the system – and of course, to be able to make it into the final proof." Duncan warned that this system was not without its problems.

References in translated editions of Journals

Carmel Williams asked whether when an article was translated into another language it was acceptable to leave the references in English to minimize the workload. The forum considered it would be acceptable but dates and words such as 'available', 'editors', and 'In' should be translated. Ines Steffens added that he asked authors to provide a translation of the title in English where articles contain references to original documents in languages other than English and there is no English title in PubMED. The translation appears in [] after the original title and they indicate the original language after the information about the publisher and publication date.

Plagiarism check software and its (mis)use

Ivana was concerned that editors were blindly evaluating for plagiarism by relying on percentages of plagiarism delivered by plagiarism check software. While these systems reported on the entire paper, the Results and Discussion sections were the most important parts of the paper as concerns plagiarism. At their journal they always look at the paper itself before deciding to refuse it or not. This topic has been covered by a previous discussion on the forum[5] but Valerie Matarese quoted a more recent article she and Karen Shashok had published[6] which deals with the topic and explained "We wrote this article in response to a consensus statement on core competencies for editors of biomedical journals, which did not include skills in dealing with plagiarism. The consensus statement has already been endorsed by EASE, but Karen and I hope that it will be revised and improved, taking better into account the needs of the users of journals, namely authors and readers. We propose that authors' editors can provide useful insight for this purpose from their close work with authors."

Elise Langdon-Neuner ***(compiler)***
a.a.neuner@gmail.com

Discussion initiators

Michael Altus: altus@intensivecarecomm.com
Carol Norris: carol.norris@helsinki.fi
Richard Loch: richard@rlorch.net
Yateen Joshi: yateendra.joshi@gmail.com
Pippa Smart: pippa.smart@gmail.com
Carmel Williams: williams@hsph.harvard.edu
Ivana Štětinová: stetinova@ueb.cas.cz

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3 Committee on Publication Ethics flow charts. Available at https://publicationethics.org/files/Full%20set%20of%20English%20flowcharts_9Nov2016.pdf (accessed 11 February 2018)
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EASE new Council 2018–2021 and members

The 2018-2021 Council members are:

President: Pippa Smart
Vice Presidents: Duncan Nicholas, Ines Steffens
Treasurer: Rod Hunt
Past President (by default): Ana Marušić
Chief-Editor: Ksenija Baždarić (ex officio)
Ordinary Members of Council:

- Sylwia Ufnalska
- Rachael Lammey
- Stephan Mertens
- Jadranka Stojanovski
- Cem Uzun
- Flaminio Squazzoni
- Bahar Mehmani
- Yateendra Joshi

EASE would also like to welcome new members:

- Ellis van den Boogaard, US
- Natalia V Korszniak, Australia
- David Tracey, Switzerland
- Ulrike Lodemann, Germany
- Mersiha Mahmic-Kaknjo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Hayley Henderson, UK
- Pekka Nygren, Finland
- Alan Purvis, Japan
- Matti Maltamo, Finland
- John A Loadsman, Australia
- Delia Mihaila, Switzerland
- Jadranka Svarc, Croatia
- Malgorzata Wiesner-Spyrczynska, Poland
- Margaret Rutka, Canada
- Andrew Coulson, UK
- Josefine Bové, Sweden

Group membership:

- Croatian Medical Journal, Croatia