

Correspondence

Promoting global health: the role of medical journal editors

In May 2015, WAME issued a policy statement on the social responsibilities of medical journal editors to publish “whenever possible, research that furthers health worldwide”.¹ It called for editors in high-income countries to invite researchers from low and middle-income countries to participate on editorial boards and as peer reviewers and to submit editorials and commentaries on local context.

We support this call and would like to add some points from our experiences at *The Lancet* group journals. *The Lancet* has long been an advocate of global health and in 2013 launched a journal dedicated to this topic. The preference of *The Lancet Global Health* is that papers should be authored or at least co-authored by researchers in the country where the research is conducted.

The Lancet policy is that research pertaining to a given country should be peer reviewed by a researcher based in that country and familiar with the population, setting, databases or questionnaires used, as appropriate. Finding such reviewers can be difficult: in addition to the usual database searches, it often requires asking multiple board members or respected researchers in global health for suggestions. In a recent post on the Scholarly Kitchen,² Angela Cochran suggested searching databases of dissertations and conference programmes as a way of expanding a journal’s pool of reviewers, not necessarily just from low and middle income countries. It is important to give feedback to inexperienced reviewers which will both encourage them to review for the journal in the future and improve their performance. One way, if a journal doesn’t do this as standard practice, is to send all the reviewers’ comments to junior reviewers after the final decision has been made on the paper.

Letter to the editor

I much enjoyed the article in the last issue by Omar Sabaj *et al*¹ on the periods of time taken between submitting an article, finding referees, receiving their reports, making editorial decisions, and eventual publication in three Chilean journals. What was of particular interest was the amount of time taken here for the editors of one of the journals to find appropriate referees.

As the authors themselves suggest, one way of reducing this is to submit the titles and the abstracts of submissions to a pre-established database of potential referees. The *British Journal of Educational Technology* uses such a system. Here, groups of anonymised abstracts are forwarded regularly to a panel of volunteer referees, and members of the panel are asked to choose (say up to three) papers that they would be willing to referee. The editor then sends these papers out appropriately – choosing which respondents to ask if

Lancet journals commission a comment to accompany each research article and where relevant, we do invite authors from low and middle-income countries. *The Lancet Psychiatry* also publishes stand-alone comments which have proven to be a good outlet for topics on global mental health. Some of these reports need substantive editing but we feel that this investment is worthwhile.

A new initiative relevant to this is being trialled by *The Lancet Psychiatry* in the form of an Editorial Board Development Programme.³ Six psychiatrists from developing countries will receive training in peer review, manuscript assessment and other aspects of the editorial process. They will share their acquired skills and knowledge with peers and other researchers and students in their countries, thereby building capacity and hopefully raising the profile and standards of global mental health. We hope that if this initiative is successful, it might be adopted by other journals for the benefit of researchers, healthcare workers and patients around the world.

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References

- 1 WAME website (www.wame.org/about/policy-statements).
- 2 Cochran A <http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2015/11/04/is-reviewer-fatigue-a-real-thing/> Accessed 4 November 2015
- 3 Marsh J, Boyce N *The Lancet Psychiatry* Editorial Board Development Programme. *The Lancet Psychiatry*

there are more than three volunteers, and twisting arms (or re-circulating the paper titles) if there are no immediate respondents. This process, which we call “peer choice” appears to work well. A recent account has been provided by Hartley, Cowan and Rushby².

References

- 1 Sabaj O, Valderrama J O, Gonzalez-Vergara C, Pinar-Stranger A. Relationship between the duration of peer review, publication decision, and agreement among reviewers in three Chilean journals. *European Science Editing*. 2015;41(4):87-90.
- 2 Hartley J, Cowan J, Rushby, N. Peer choice - does reviewer self-selection work? *Learned Publishing*. 2015. DOI: 10.1111/bjet.12360