

European Science Editing

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From the editors' desks

It's all in the name

Those of you who attended the Bath conference or read our past president's editorial in the November issue of the journal know that the EASE Council is considering a change in the name of our organization. Some responses to Tom van Loon's editorial appear in this issue. Please take a moment to read these and consider your own stand. Council would welcome more discussion of the pro's and con's of taking such a major step, either on the forum or as additional correspondence for the journal. Please let us hear from you (write to the EASE secretary, postal and e-mail addresses as below).

A step forward

Be sure to see the inserts in this issue. One of them concerns a new activity for EASE and its members. In conjunction with the next Annual General Meeting in Barcelona in May, EASE will hold its first seminar at the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, which is collaborating with EASE in arrangements for this event. An international selection of six speakers will present their views on "Scientific Publications in a Digital Age". Additional information can be found on the insert or by contacting Reme Melero (rmelero@iata.csic.es), the seminar coordinator. Information also appears on our web site, with a registration form. The seminar is free to paid-up members of EASE and we look forward to seeing many of you there.

Membership survey

This issue of *European Science Editing* also includes a membership survey. The questions were drawn up in consultation with the Council and various members contacted in Bath. Our hope is that your responses will guide us in developing new activities

and benefits for members, and also help us to attract new members to EASE. A particularly large group of members has retired in the last year or two, and it is important for the Association's well-being and long-term prospects that we each make an effort to recruit new members. So please take a few minutes to look at the questions and to give us your advice. How can we better promote EASE? We also welcome your comments, ideas, and criticisms in the "free" spaces provided. If you wish, you can share your thoughts via our web site if that is more convenient. We look forward to hearing from you and will try to publish the preliminary results in the next issue of the journal. Thanks in advance.

Annual General Meeting 2004

The AGM will follow the seminar in Barcelona on 7 May mentioned above. The time will be posted on the EASE web site and notices will be sent out in due course.

EASE forum

Queries are still coming in about accessing the Forum. For those of you who have not realized it, the Forum moved house last spring, and any member wanting access must re-subscribe. Instructions for subscribing to the "new" forum can be found in this issue (p. 20) and on our web site.

Contributions for the May issue

Contributions for the next issue (due in May) are invited and should be sent to the appropriate member of the Editorial Board (see right, and see "Instructions to Authors", this issue p. 37-38 and on the EASE web site: www.ease.org.uk/). The deadline for the May issue is **15 March** (but articles should arrive by **1 March**).

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Contributions for *European Science Editing* should be sent to the Chief Editor or the appropriate section editor listed above. See Instructions for authors on EASE's web site (www.ease.org.uk/).

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Editorial

Communicating science: the editor's role

Do we know what a science editor does? Or even what an editor does? "What it means to be an editor" was the title of the 7th triennial meeting of EASE in Tours in 2000 but calling someone an editor is about as enlightening as calling someone a pilot. We understand that a pilot is someone who shows the way. How? To whom? Where to?

It is generally accepted that an editor is someone who has to do with publication — in our case, of science. In other words, we are concerned with making science known. Known to whom? Presumably to one's readers? This assumes that we limit the editor's role to the printed media. Of the readers, some are informed about science in the broadest sense, some know nothing, most fall between the two extremes.

The low end of the scale is what I, as a "science editor", am most concerned about. To borrow from Madame de Stael (as quoted in *The Write Stuff* 2001;12(1):18): "Search for the truth is the noblest occupation of man; its publication is a duty". This is a beautiful thought but it raises questions and invites discussion. The present attempt to add to this discussion was triggered by a remarkable book review by John Cornwell [1] that examined the topic of communication between scientists and non-scientists at some length. Surely editors have a role here. More and more pseudo-science, or pseudo interpretation of science, screams for attention, often via lurid headlines: "Dreaded virus hits potato crop", or, in your e-mail inbox: "Hackers have your address".

Newspapers, TV, the web and so on, are mostly secondary sources that quote journals, both paper and online. They are not disinterested sources. News, mostly scary news, sells. The original information was probably highly sophisticated. It was then interpreted, condensed and conveyed variously, probably with a purpose — ostensibly to inform, certainly to produce an effect. Editors, as people who deal with (written?) communication, come in at this stage. Again, what is their role? Are they free agents? Assuming that the *ESE* readership, i.e. the EASE membership, is made up of journal editors who are free agents, our aim is to ensure that the findings, speculations or predictions of scientists get exposure, presumably to their colleagues. This is usually done in print or at meetings and online. English is the lingua franca, of necessity in a specialized form. Depending on the editor's specific job, making sure that a report is presented in such a way that it is intelligible to the scientific world is the ultimate purpose.

However, the general public increasingly claims its right to know. At this point, the process of making the knowledge accessible is a job for editors. They need to bridge "the yawning gap between real science and popularization" [1]. Obviously only someone with a proper grasp of the topic can produce a faithful simplification. Shining examples of this occur when the editor is a scientist. The American Medical Writers Association, as announced in notices for its 63rd annual conference, is giving an award to two scientists for their outstanding skill in reporting on controversial topics for the public. According to AMWA these editors produced responsible reporting "amid the chaos and confusion surrounding" such topics as Alzheimer's disease, hormone replacement therapy, or medication mistakes. Sensationalism will always be with us, but the better educated the general public becomes, the better they will be able to distinguish between hysterical reports and the truth these are based on. More questions will be asked and gross exaggerations will be looked at with the cynicism they deserve.

In our role as science editors we can and must ensure that both sides of a question are reported upon. Not only reported, but presented in a context that gives a relatively uninformed reader, listener, etc., an idea of where the discovery, threat, or whatever, fits in the general scheme of things. In particular, editors concerned with science journalism for the mass media need to not only "tell" but also "ask". There is a case for the use of plain language in communicating science. Using plain language is not "dumbing down" but caters to an ever-larger audience.

While we may not have a precise job description for editors, answering the questionnaire distributed with this issue of *ESE* will start us thinking hard and constructively about our role as EASE members. We certainly have a major role to play in keeping readers (surfers?), i.e. consumers of scientific information, acquainted with the *how* and *why*, and not only with the *what* of happenings in the world of science.

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-

Articles

Peer reviewer opinions regarding publication-specific acknowledgement: a survey study

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Abstract

Background: Standards of contributorship now being used for authors might also apply to peer reviewers, given the major contributions they make to published papers. We assessed reviewer opinions about publication-specific acknowledgement, in which reviewers would be identified at the end of published manuscripts.

Methods: Reviewers at the *Annals of Internal Medicine* were sent a survey assessing general opinions regarding acknowledgement, their personal wishes for acknowledgment without and with institutional recognition, and the likelihood of institutional recognition.

Results: Seventy-eight of 96 reviewers (81%) responded. Thirty-seven of 77 respondents (48%, 95% confidence interval [CI] 37%–60%) opposed acknowledgement; 46 of 74 (62%, 95% CI 50%–73%) thought it would not be recognized by their institutions but 38 of 73 (51%, 95% CI 40%–64%) desired acknowledgement if it were recognized. The difference in wishes for acknowledgement without and with institutional recognition was significant ($P < 0.001$). No differences in responses were observed by years from training, academic title, and professional activities, but teachers were more likely than others to favour the idea ($P = 0.001$). Reviewers who objected voiced concerns about bias, editorial conflicts, and retribution.

Conclusions: Support among peer reviewers for publication-specific acknowledgement was divided, but more reviewers would want it if it were institutionally recognized. Teachers especially supported the idea.

Berkwits M, Localio AR, Davidoff F. 2004. Peer reviewer opinions regarding publication-specific acknowledgement: a survey study. *European Science Editing* 30(1):5–7.

Several medical journals now list authors' specific contributions to research papers in an attempt to credit researchers, make their relative contributions more transparent to readers, and hold the authors accountable for their work [1–3]. One additional major group of contributors to published research remains virtually invisible, however. Peer reviewers are of course not primary contributors to research manuscripts, but standards of disclosure and credit now being used for authors might also apply to them, for several reasons. Reviewers play roles strongly supportive of the standards that comprise criteria for authorship [4]; their contributions lead to major changes in manuscripts prior to publication [5]; and high-quality peer review is a product of scholarship and experiences of types that are typically recognized and are required for career advancement in academic and other settings. In addition, there is limited accountability under current systems of anonymous peer review. The year-end printing of reviewers' names that many journals use to acknowledge reviewers separates credit from reviewers' specific contributions, and does little to improve accountability.

For these reasons we hypothesized that readers and authors might desire disclosure and reviewers might desire and deserve the recognition of publication-specific acknowledgement, in which peer

reviewers would be identified with their consent at the end of published manuscripts. Our secondary hypothesis was that junior and clinical reviewers, who typically are eager to establish academic credentials or who have more patient-care responsibilities and less time for publishing and are therefore looking for academic opportunities and recognition, would desire this form of acknowledgement more than senior and research reviewers, who need recognition less. As a pilot step in testing these hypotheses we sought to determine if support for the idea existed among peer reviewers at a general medical journal.

Methods

Consecutive peer reviewers reviewing original research manuscripts submitted to the *Annals of Internal Medicine* in the summer of 2000 were sent a four-item questionnaire that included a brief written rationale for asking questions about acknowledgement and assurance that no reviewer would be named without their consent. Reviewers were asked (1) what they thought generally about the idea of publication-specific acknowledgement; (2) if they would want it personally; (3) how likely they thought it that publication-specific acknowledgement would be used for career enhancement or

promotion, given present practice at their institutions; and (4) if they would want acknowledgement if it were institutionally recognized. Responses of 1 on a 5-point scale signified strong opposition to the idea of acknowledgement, belief that institutional recognition was very unlikely, and strong personal disinclination for acknowledgement; responses of 5 signified strong endorsement of the idea, belief that institutional acknowledgement was very likely, and strong personal wishes for acknowledgement. Reviewers also provided information on years since training and the proportion of their time spent in clinical, research, administrative, and other activities (all continuous variables). Finally, they gave information on academic titles and the approximate number of manuscripts they had previously written and peer reviewed (categorical variables).

The study was designed to have 80% power to detect a 25% difference in proportions of respondents favouring publication-specific acknowledgement, based on an assumption that 5% of senior research and 30% of junior clinical reviewers would favour the idea.

Analyses

Survey scores were compared using rank sum tests. Univariable and multivariable testing of associations between demographic variables and survey scores for each question was performed using ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression. In the multivariable model, dependent demographic variables (years from training, proportion of time spent in clinical, research and similar activities, academic titles, and approximate numbers of articles published and peer reviewed) were used to predict survey scores (independent variable). All analyses were performed using STATA version 6.0 (State College, Pennsylvania).

Results

Seventy-eight of 96 reviewers (81%) responded. Reviewers were a mean 22.5 years (standard deviation 11.4) out of postgraduate training, and spent roughly equivalent times in clinical (median 27.5%, interquartile range [IQR] 10% to 50%), research (20%, IQR 7.5% to 50%), and administrative (20%, IQR 5% to 40%) activities. Twenty-nine respondents (39%) listed "other" activities, primarily teaching ($n=23$) but also unspecified activities ($n=3$), policy, communication, and writing ($n=1$ each). Seventy-three (93.5%) reported academic appointments, 15 (20.5%) at assistant professor level or below. Fifty-six (73%) had published over 25 manuscripts in their careers and 54 (70%) reviewed five to six manuscripts annually; just under half had published over 50 manuscripts and reviewed seven or more manuscripts annually ($n=34$ [44%]).

Reviewers slightly opposed the idea of publication-specific acknowledgement (mean score 2.7, standard deviation [SD] 1.3; median score 3, IQR 2–4); 37 of 77 respondents (48%, 95% CI 37%–60%) were against the idea and 51 of 77 (66%, 95% CI 55%–76%) were neutral or against it. The same was true of personal wishes for acknowledgement (mean 2.6, SD 1.4; median 3, IQR 1–4); 37 of 76 (49%, 95% CI 37%–60%) wanted it rarely or never. A clear majority thought it

unlikely their institutions would recognize publication-specific acknowledgement (mean 2.2, SD 1.3; median 2, IQR 1–3); 46 of 74 (62%, 95% CI 50%–73%) thought it unlikely or extremely unlikely. The proportion of reviewers favouring acknowledgement increased if they knew it would be institutionally recognized (mean score 3.3, SD 1.3; median 4, IQR 2–4); 38 of 73 (51%, 95% CI 40%–64%) were in favour. Differences between wishes for acknowledgement without and with institutional recognition were statistically significant ($P < 0.001$).

Univariate and multivariable analyses revealed no statistically significant differences in opinion by respondents' years since training, past scholarship, or peer review experience, and clinicians were just as likely as researchers or administrators to favour or dislike the idea (all P values > 0.20). However, increased time spent in "other" activities was predictive of wishes for acknowledgement, independent of all other variables ($P = 0.001$). This finding held for all survey questions.

Qualitative responses

Twelve reviewers (15%) offered their own understanding of problems and solutions regarding peer review in free-text entries in the survey's margins. These reviewers objected to the idea of publication-specific acknowledgement on both principled and practical grounds.

Most were concerned about the effects of revealing reviewer identity on review objectivity. "There is no way [acknowledgment] will not affect the impartial review process," one reviewer wrote; "it abrogates impartiality." Another noted that "identified reviewers will be the ones who praised the manuscript; this creates an incentive to praise it." The concern was reiterated by a third reviewer: "any time someone has a chance to see one's name in print, bias toward approval appears."

Respondents also shared practical concerns about the consequences of conflicts between reviewer opinions and editorial decisions, ignoring our assurance that no reviewer would be identified without consent. "If I supported the article I would be delighted," one wrote. But "if I did not but it was published anyway I would have to defend my position." Another reviewer noted that "not all reviewers' opinions are taken into account, and readers may believe that the reviewer missed some important point when in fact this may have been covered in the review but not altered in the manuscript." A third reviewer was concerned with retribution: "if you review the manuscript critically [and] it gets accepted . . . your name [is] attached [and] the author can figure out the review you did."

Aside from practical concerns, two reviewers noted that "most of us do this chore as a civic duty" and "some work has to be done unacknowledged."

Still, some respondents recognized the spirit if not the letter of our proposal. One commented that sometimes "reviewers essentially rewrite [an] article," and "actually . . . become co-authors." Another wrote "I am pleased you are seeking new ways to acknowledge the great effort that goes into providing reviews

. . . I know many faculty who routinely turn down reviews because they believe there is no reward."

Respondents offered their own suggestions for improving our proposal and the recognition of peer review more generally. One proposed that reviewers' names be revealed not only for published manuscripts but for "all reviews, whether the paper is accepted or not." Another agreed that journals "should be consistent: always disclose or never disclose." A third proposed that journals invite a "mini-editorial" by the reviewer [which] would be of greater value to reviewers and readers." A fourth suggested "acknowledging not the quantity but the quality of my reviews, perhaps [with] a letter of thanks at the end of the year that highlighted how well I had done."

Discussion

Peer reviewers at present make substantial contributions to manuscripts at most medical journals with limited credit and accountability. Except among reviewers reporting substantial time spent in "other activities," the majority of whom were teachers, we found divided support for naming reviewers in print at the end of published manuscripts as a way of improving credit and accountability. Reviewers did, however, express an interest in improving recognition for peer review activities in other ways.

Reasons for reviewer objections to acknowledgment can only be provisionally inferred from these data. Concerns about impartiality, editorial conflicts, retribution, and public responsibility kept some reviewers from endorsing the idea. Others may have been content with systems for acknowledgement currently in place in their professional settings. This seemed less the case for teachers and non-researchers, whose enthusiasm for our proposal may reflect a perceived lack of opportunity for recognition or a need for discrete measures of academic productivity compared to researchers and others in academic settings.

Reviewer objections to disclosure must be understood in light of other journals' experience, however. The *BMJ* and *British Journal of Psychiatry* have systems of open peer review in which reviewers sign their names to reviews [6–8], and implementation of open review at the former led to a negligible increase in refusals among reviewers to review manuscripts [8]. Moreover, open review led to no decrease in quality of reviews or in the time it took to return them, and one study suggested that disclosure of reviewer identity increased reviewer fairness and courtesy [9]. Though a system in which reviewer identity is revealed to authors is clearly different from one which reveals reviewer identities to journal readers, it is possible that reviewers in our study objected to the prospect of change more than the prospect of publication-specific acknowledgement itself.

The study also has limitations. Our investigation was a pilot study using a convenience sample of reviewers. Respondents therefore may not represent the full population of reviewers at our or other journals. Also, the

study may not have been large enough to detect statistically significant differences in survey responses by professional activities and other variables; respondents included few junior clinical faculty, who we hypothesized would most desire opportunities for peer review and recognition. Survey studies always raise questions about differences between what people say they believe and what they really believe or how they would really behave, and we could not distinguish between the two on the basis of survey responses alone. Finally, the study did not solicit or address the responses of authors, the group most likely to be interested in reviewer accountability.

These data nevertheless suggest that at least some support exists among reviewers of a general medical journal for improving recognition of peer review. Suggestions for publishing reviewer editorials or for sending reviewers letters of thanks or acknowledgement point editors to options besides published acknowledgement for crediting reviewers. Our findings that wishes for acknowledgement increased with the prospect of institutional recognition hint that academic leaders, and not just editors, have a significant role to play in the process. If stakeholders can agree that peer review activities deserve more recognition, the challenge for all will be to determine how journals can acknowledge reviewer contributions in a way that encourages and rewards outstanding efforts, protects reviewers and authors from bias, and maintains the integrity of the process of peer review — which, while far from perfect, remains a key guarantor of quality in published science.

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Editorial decision-making based on abstracts

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Abstract

Background: We were interested to know whether editors at the *BMJ* could make a decision about manuscripts based on reading only the abstract and how this initial decision differed from when they read the whole submission.

Methods: Editors were instructed to read only the abstract of manuscripts submitted and to try to make an editorial decision (immediate rejection, send to external peer reviewer, need for further in-house consultation). Having made their decision they were then instructed to read the whole manuscript and make a decision based on the whole submission.

Results: For 229/372 (62%) submissions, editors were able to make an editorial decision based on reading only the abstract. Where a decision could be made, there was no significant difference between the two assessments in the proportion of papers rejected immediately by a single editor. Neither was there a significant difference between the two assessments in the proportion of papers where it was suggested that the submission should be sent to an external reviewer.

Conclusion: It is acceptable for editors to reject a submission based only on reading an abstract if they feel that it is clearly inappropriate for the journal's readership or is fatally flawed in terms of methods.

The abstract is possibly the most important section of a research article as, with the exception of the title, it is the most frequently read and easily accessed section [1]. It should provide an accurate synopsis of the key content of the paper and readers should be informed of the importance of the study, the research question, the methods used and key findings. Similarly, by reading the abstract, editors should be able to gain a good understanding of why and how a study was conducted, its wider implications and its suitability for their journal's readership.

The British Medical Journal (*BMJ*) is a general medical journal and receives over 4000 research papers each year. Approximately two-thirds of these submissions are rejected in-house by editors without consulting external peer reviewers. The editor first assigned the paper (first reader) has the choice to send it for external peer review, consult the opinion of other editorial colleagues, or reject it immediately. With an increasing number of submissions, editors are under additional pressure to make decisions quickly. They need to use their time efficiently and effectively but also have a commitment to act fairly to authors.

We conducted an experiment to see if editors at the *BMJ* could make a decision about manuscripts based on reading only the abstract and whether this initial decision changed when they read the whole submission.

Methods

Only original research papers containing a structured abstract were included in the study. Editors assigned the role of first reader of *BMJ* submissions were first instructed to read the abstract of manuscripts and no other material related to the submission. They were then asked to indicate on a form the time taken to read the abstract and either their editorial decision (immediate rejection, send to external peer reviewer, need for further in-house consultation) or their inability to make a decision based on the abstract alone. Having made their decision based on the abstract, they were

then instructed to read the whole manuscript and indicate on a separate form the time taken to do this and their editorial decision based on reading the whole submission. The level of agreement between the two assessments was evaluated using the kappa statistic. The final editorial decision made for each submission after these papers had been fully processed (i.e. accept or reject) was gathered for all papers in the study from our manuscript tracking system.

During the study period, actual decisions about the fate of the manuscripts were made after reading the whole submission.

Results

During the study there were 483 submissions containing a structured abstract. We received a pair of completed assessment forms for 77% (372/483) of these submissions. Twelve experienced editors took part. For 229 (62%) of the 372 submissions, editors were able to make an editorial decision based on reading just the abstract.

Where a decision could be made ($n=229$), there was no significant difference between the two assessments in the proportion of papers rejected immediately by a single editor (39.3% reading whole paper versus 42.4% reading abstract alone; χ^2 [1 df]=0.443, $P>0.2$). Neither was there a significant difference between the two assessments in the proportion of papers where it was suggested that the submission should be sent to an external peer reviewer (14.4% reading whole paper versus 20.1% reading abstract alone; χ^2 [1 df]=2.585, $P>0.1$). However, it took significantly longer to read the whole paper (mean time = 7.69 [SD 5.0] minutes) than the abstract (2.34 [SD 1.6] minutes), $P<0.0001$.

Table 1 shows a cross-tabulation of decisions made when the whole manuscript was read and when the abstract alone was read. There was good agreement [2] between decisions ($\kappa=0.71$, $n=229$). Editors immediately rejected 90/229 (39%) of manuscripts on reading the whole submission, and for 84/90 (93%) of

Table 1. Cross tabulation of decisions based on reading the whole paper and the abstract alone. Values are numbers (percentages)

		Decision based on reading whole paper				Final editorial decision*		
		Immediate rejection† n (%)	Send to external peer reviewer‡ n (%)	Further in-house consultation § n (%)	Total	Accept n (%)	Reject n (%)	Not known n (%)
Decision based on reading abstract	Immediate rejection†	84 (93)	1 (3)	12 (11)	97	0 (0)	96 (44)	3 (33)
	Send to external peer reviewer‡	0 (0)	28 (85)	18 (17)	46	3 (43)	41 (19)	2 (67)
	Further in-house consultation§	6 (7)	4 (12)	76 (72)	86	4 (57)	82 (37)	0 (0)
	Total	90 (100)	33 (100)	106 (100)	229	7 (100)	219 (100)	3 (100)

Note: Figures in bold reflect agreement.

*Final decision made after whole editorial process.

†Submission rejected based on the decision of only one editor without peer review.

‡Decision to send the paper to an external peer reviewer.

§Decision to consult at least one other editor.

these papers the same decision had been reached when the abstract alone had been read. There were no recommendations to send any of these 90 submissions to an external peer reviewer when the abstract alone was read. Only 6% (13/229) of papers that would have been rejected immediately, based on the abstract, would have continued further through the review system if the whole paper had been read. However, the final editorial decision for these 13 papers was in fact not to publish them (Table 1). None of the seven papers where the final editorial decision was to publish would have been rejected on the basis of a reading of the abstract alone.

Discussion

Where editors felt confident that they could make a decision about a submission based on the abstract alone, they went on to make similar decisions when they read the whole submission. When the decision, based on the abstract, was immediately to reject papers, this also resulted in a final decision of rejection from the journal once the papers had been fully processed. Making decisions based on abstracts is unlikely to lead to papers being sent out for unnecessary peer review. When only the abstract was read, no decisions to send the submissions for external review were made where the decision on reading a paper was to reject it.

There are several limitations to this study. A large proportion of papers had to be excluded as we did not receive a pair of assessment forms and these may have differed from those included. Similarly, papers where the editor could not make a decision based on the abstract may have differed in quality from those where a decision could be made on reading the abstract. Editors were from one general medical journal and were aware of the purpose of the study. They may have behaved differently from usual and may have found it

difficult to make two independent decisions about the same submission. However, this was the most feasible study design in order for normal editorial practice to continue during the study period, and editors reported that they tried to make independent decisions. Finally, as the *BMJ* has a very low acceptance rate it is difficult to judge the sensitivity and specificity of making decisions based on reading abstracts; only seven (3%) of the papers included in the study were finally accepted for publication.

We conclude that it is acceptable for editors to reject a submission after reading only an abstract if they feel that it is clearly inappropriate for the journal's readership or is fatally flawed in terms of methods. This will enable editors to concentrate their attention on appraising the small proportion of papers which are likely to be accepted. Where editors feel they need to read more information for clarification they should do so. *BMJ* editors now screen submissions for rejection based on reading abstracts alone where possible. Authors should be encouraged to write clear abstracts [3] and be informed of how editors make decisions about submissions to their journal.

Acknowledgements

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Editing in Croatia

We are continuing this series which focuses on opinions on specific aspects of editing in particular countries. We would like to attract more comments on non-medical fields. Contributions are welcome and should be sent to Edward Towpik, redakcja@coi.waw.pl.

Editing biomedical journals in Croatia

Ana Marusic, Matko Marusic

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With 55 000 square kilometres and 4.5 million inhabitants, Croatia is a country with a unique geography: as a Mediterranean country it belongs to Southern Europe, but it is geographically and culturally also in Central Europe; it also lies between the Western and Eastern Europe. It gained its long-sought independence in 1991, suffering a devastating war and post-communist transition (Marusic & Marusic 2002).

Profile of biomedical science in Croatia

Although Croatia belongs to the so-called scientific periphery (Klaic 1997), scientific research in this country has always received supportive attention from the state, even during the time of communist Yugoslavia. In 1999, the medical community comprised 10 439 physicians, 2891 dentists, and 2088 pharmacists (Misak et al. 2002). There were 1328 researchers in natural sciences, 882 in medical sciences and 598 in biotechnological sciences, all of them potential authors and readers of biomedical journals. As in other communist countries (Towpik 2003), biomedical science was considered politically neutral and was not subject to oppression, but was instead left free to develop and interact with the international scientific community during the communist regime (1945–1990). There was an especially strong tradition of research in the fields of chemistry and biochemistry, where Croatia has two Nobel Prize laureates: Lavoslav Ružička (awarded in 1939) and Vladimir Prelog (awarded in 1975).

Today Croatia has 260 scientific journals, 12 of which are indexed in the prestigious Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) *Web of Science* bibliographic database. Among them, *Croatica Chemica Acta* was the first to be visible in the international bibliographic databases (since 1973 in *Current Contents/Physical, Chemical & Earth Sciences*).

Among the 43 biomedical journals, four are of special importance. The oldest is a medical journal, *Liječnički Vjesnik*, established in 1877. It is the official journal of the Croatian Association of Physicians and is published in Croatian, with English titles, and is indexed in Medline. Among basic biomedical journals, the oldest is *Periodicum Biologorum*, established in 1885 and published today only in English. It was indexed in the ISI bibliographic databases *Science Citation Index* and *Current Contents/Life Sciences* from 1974 until 1992; it is now indexed in the ISI *Web of Science*. *Collegium Anthropologicum*, established in 1977 and indexed in the ISI *Web of Science* and *Current Contents/Social Sciences*, is a product of traditionally strong

anthropological research in Croatia. The *Croatian Medical Journal* is the youngest medical journal, established in 1992 as a successor to *Acta Facultatis Medicae Zagrabensis*, which dates from 1953. *CMJ* is a general medical journal in English only — it publishes more than 100 research articles per year and is indexed in *Index Medicus/Medline*, *ISI's Web of Science*, and *Current Contents/Clinical Medicine* (Marusic et al. 2002).

Today, seven Croatian biomedical journals are indexed in *Index Medicus/Medline*, four in *ISI's Web of Science*, and two in *Current Contents* editions. A recent survey of 37 regularly published Croatian biomedical journals showed that there were 14 general and 23 specialist journals (Misak et al. 2002). Their total circulations range from 300 to 7200 per year, and they are mostly quarterly journals (22 out of 37 surveyed). Most are published by professional associations, hospitals, and research or educational institutions.

The small size of the Croatian scientific community is obvious in the number of articles received and published: the editors in the survey reported a median of 30 articles per year, with a median rejection rate of 13%. The journals mostly publish original scientific articles (32 out of 37 journals), reviews (25 journals), and technical papers (26 journals). All surveyed journals complied with the Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts submitted to Biomedical Journals of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. Almost all journals use some kind of review form and more than half use an international reviewer pool. The language is mostly either Croatian (11 journals, some with abstracts in English) or a mixture of Croatian and English (14 journals). Twelve journals publish in English, some with Croatian abstracts. Because of the substantial number of articles in English, many journals (22 out of 37) have an international editorial board. At the time of the survey (2002), most of the journals were not electronically visible to the international scientific community: only 16 journals had a web page, but only five offered abstracts and four of these also offered full text.

Problems of Croatian journals and their editors

Most Croatian biomedical journals depend on financial support from the state (25 out of 37), but many also receive income from other sources, such as advertisements, subscriptions, donations, or local funding bodies (Misak et al. 2002). Although the predominance of state support in journal funding

indicates the interest of the government in scientific research and publishing, the fact that the median circulation of the Croatian journals is 2.5-fold higher than the median number of subscribers indicates that the financial security of governmental support may be counterproductive in some ways, primarily because it leads to a lack of incentive for adequate management of the journals. Also, none of the editors holds a full-time editorial job and only 5 out of 37 reported receiving fees for their editorial work. However, when asked about problems in journal publishing, most of the editors (28 out of 37) put finances in the first place. This was followed by lack of submitted articles and problems with the review process. Low on the list of problems were marketing, editorial issues, staff, indexing in bibliographic databases, and regular publication.

The authors of the survey concluded that biomedical publishing in Croatia reflected the problems of a small scientific community (Misak et al. 2002). It seems that because of the lack of self-regulatory mechanisms and professional competition in scientific activities journals in such communities cannot break out of the vicious circle of inadequacy (Marusic & Marusic 1999). The Croatian scientific community is not large enough to support the current number of journals with either financial resources or number of scientific articles. Some problems of editorial work that occur in scientific journals worldwide may be even more pressing in journals at the scientific periphery. For example, peer review is a rather heavy ethical burden for the editor of a Croatian biomedical journal because of the small size of the pool of peer reviewers. As many journals rely only on Croatian reviewers, it is difficult to keep reviews objective in a small community where almost all professionals know each other. The small size of the author pool also presents the editors with dilemmas not so obvious in journals from larger scientific communities. Coming from the academic/research setting themselves, the editors encounter obvious breaches of authorship criteria, especially guest authorship. In an academic setting where the number of published articles is the main prerequisite for promotion, as in most other countries, editors often find names on the by-lines of submitted articles whom they know could not have contributed to the paper.

Editors as educators

During our work as editors of an international general medical journal established and published in Croatia, we learned that Croatian authors had a lot to contrib-

ute to the international community (Marusic & Marusic 2002). However, authors needed help in presenting their work because they lacked skills not only in the English language but also primarily in scientific writing and data analysis and presentation. Early in our editorial work we learned that perhaps the main role of an editor in a small scientific community is that of a teacher (Marusic & Marusic 2001). Journal editors have a strong scientific influence and thus should have a moral obligation to become a source of quality and advancement in their scientific community. They have two powerful teaching tools — their own editorial integrity and author-helpful policies. By maintaining his or her editorial integrity, the editor can set standards of publishing and research that are quickly accepted by the local scientific community because of the very nature of the publishing process. Because of his or her strong influence on authors, as well as independence from outside influences, the editor of a scientific journal is in a unique position to work with authors and help them to acquire skills in research methodology and presentation of research results. In this way, editors as teachers are the key figures in shaping research in their scientific communities (Marusic et al. 2002). We therefore call on our Croatian colleague editors and on editors in similar scientific environments to take the lead in their scientific community and follow the motto: *Educatione ad excellentiam!*

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Correspondence

What's in a name?

It is probably inevitable that any group of editors will tend to agonise over nomenclature, as that is our line of business. In the last issue of *European Science Editing*

(November 2003; 29(4): 104–105), Tom van Loon proposed that the Association's name and that of its journal should be changed. I agree with almost

everything that he says in his editorial — apart from the need to change either name. After all, we have not done too badly under our present alias since EASE was founded in May 1982. All possible options need to be considered before such important decisions are taken; not all these options have yet been addressed.

With regard to the journal, I agree that *European Science Editing* is an ungrammatical and rather daft title. I get over this problem because I think of the journal as *J EASE*. I doubt if I am alone in this misattribution. If one wishes to change the name of the journal one does not need to change the name of the Association, although I accept that it would make sense to do both at the same time if one was going to do either. But is it worth changing the name of the journal? It is known and listed as *ESE*, and a change is not without risk: libraries are always thrown into chaos whenever a journal changes its name, and may review and cancel their subscription.

Now, our name, the European Association of Science Editors. What do we mainly do? Edit. What do we mainly edit? Science. With whom do we associate? The Association. Where are we mainly based? Europe. Anything much wrong? No.

I agree that “editors” are often authors, researchers, new technology wizards and many other things besides. But I believe that we are most accurately classed as editors; surely the polymath attributions are just part of the job? I don’t think we need to tread on the toes of existing authors’ and other groups by adding any of those attributions unless we are proposing an amalgamation of some sort, which would need a lot more consideration (and, of course, a group or groups to amalgamate with). Alternatives such as “Communicators” smack rather of advertising or political spin-doctoring.

The next word, “science”, fits as well as anything: some of us are medical, some are from more obvious science offshoots such as geology or astronomy, and some drift into technology or sociology, but science seems the best inclusive term. “Academic” and “learned” are already taken, and sound a bit pretentious anyway.

Although I accept that there are quite reasonable alternatives to the word “Association” in our name, that’s what we’ve got and it seems quite acceptable to me. “Society” would also be fine, but is hardly much different and has the same roots; “Group” and “Club” are too elitist; “Organization” is a bit vague; “Council” is spoken for and to my mind isn’t as good anyway; “Circle” is a bit too cute; and many others don’t seem right. (How about “Parliament”, “Politburo”, “Cabinet” or “Junta”, anyone?)

Lastly, “European”. Now here’s the rub. I accept that there may be disadvantages with this geographical label in the Association’s name, but I feel it should not be forgotten that some three-quarters of the members are European, so at least it is a fairly honest designation; also, the Association’s history is European, and it will probably always have a European preponderance because most of the Americans are in the Council of Science Editors. It may well be that having the label European makes international recruitment more difficult, but wouldn’t a change to something more global such as “World” or “International” be slightly intellectually dishonest? Most of our meetings and much of our membership is likely to be European, whatever our name. One of the biggest areas for potential new members is Eastern Europe, where people might well wish to join a “European” association, and I am sure that science editors in other parts of the world will be able to judge fairly whether we or any alternative group are in fact the more international, rather than going by name alone. Besides, any attempt to internationalize our name could seriously antagonise our colleagues/rivals in the Council of Science Editors. It would rather repudiate our own history and I also feel that it would be rather intellectually dishonest, if not reprehensible, if we were to change our name only to try misleadingly to entice new people into what will probably remain a predominantly Europe-based grouping. I agree that we should be doing everything in our power to encourage membership from outside Europe, but feel that our actions would better serve this purpose, rather than our name.

I also feel that the costs of any change would be higher than expected, and would like to see a precise figure quoted before any decision on change is taken.

Finally, if we change our name without considering one other basic option, I feel that we could be accused of not going to the fundamentals. There is another organization of science editors, and there are other groups of editors/writers/publishers who have much the same concerns as we do. If we are thinking of changing our name, shouldn’t we first consider the possibility of some form of merger? I doubt if the other groups would be interested, and I doubt whether we would be interested either. But I do not feel that we can do something as fundamental as changing our name without at least considering this issue.

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One of Tom van Loon’s points in his editorial is that employers often give priority to an organization with a name that promises global activity, such as the Council of Science Editors, when deciding which association their editors outside Europe or North America should join. However, this is not borne out by CSE’s membership distribution. The 2002–2003 CSE membership list contains about 1150 names, only 107 (9.3%) of whom have addresses outside North Amer-

ica (20 of the 107, incidentally, are also members of EASE). In contrast, some 24% of EASE members are from outside Europe. It doesn’t seem that the word “European” is too off-putting.

Another point is that if the names of the organization and its journal are nonsense, as Tom contends, then we are in excellent company. Numerous journals and organizations have names beginning with “European” or “British” or the name of some other

country. EASE is indeed a European-based organization and for practical reasons may want to remain so. Is it really illogical to have “European” in the names of the association and its journal?

Some of Tom’s suggestions for a change in name indicate that the organization intends to cater for authors as well as editors. This would be a major change in direction and perhaps one that would be

hard to handle. Any author interested in joining EASE at present is probably welcome to do so — but authors’ main interests are mostly somewhat different from those of editors. Is this really the way the Council and the membership want to go? I do hope that before any change is made we will be able to vote on this matter.

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I was impressed by our Past President’s editorial. He made very clear his thinking about our name, EASE, and was most honest about setting out the pros and cons of a name change. This editorial did not come as a bombshell. Tom had been putting out feelers in this direction at earlier Council meetings. However, I disagree that the suggestion was discussed. It was treated as one of several agenda points with, as I remember, no true general discussion or comment by Council members. (This refers to Council meetings before the new Council’s meeting in Bath.)

EASE acquired its name at Pau in 1982, after much debate about possible names (see www.ease.org.uk for history of EASE). As far as I know, no one resigned because of the choice. The membership has grown since then, certainly not only in what is now known as

Europe. Those who assert that some potential members are turned off by the term “European” cite evidence from conversations, web contacts and reliable hearsay. The questions to ask are what were those people looking for, and what did they know about EASE activities?

Regarding journal names, I am well acquainted with journals that have “European” in their name. A look at the origin of papers in those journals will show a worldwide distribution. The message is clear: keep EASE, with *ESE*, growing in breadth and depth. A solid factual web page, an active Forum and an involved membership are the ingredients we need.

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This is in response to Tom van Loon’s request (*ESE* 29(4):104–105) for opinion and comments on his editorial regarding the appropriateness or not of our association name.

As I have not been party to the discussions on this subject at the EASE Council level, I may be repeating what others have said. Please excuse me if this is the case, but it seems to me that before asking members to put forward a new name, we should perhaps be asking them whether or not the majority want to change the name in the first place.

One of the points favourable to a name change that Tom lists is that “it no longer reflects the members’ activities”. All the members that I know personally are editors — although they sometimes do other things — so the association name does reflect their major activities. Take my own case as one example.

I am a science editor, so I belong to EASE. I used to belong to what was then the Council of Biology Editors but I resigned because I felt EASE was better serving my particular needs.

I am also a science writer, so I am a member of the International Science Writers Association (ISWA). I am also a Canadian citizen, so I belong, too, to the Canadian Science Writers Association (CSWA).

I am also a trainer in science communication, mostly with national research organizations and non-governmental organizations in developing countries in Africa and the Caribbean. So I am a member of the Public Communication of Science and Technology (PCST) group. This membership also covers other science communication work that I have done: designing

and organizing scientific exhibits, helping to establish newsletters and magazines in the areas of environmental and agricultural research, helping scientists to produce presentations of their work, etc.

I do not expect one association to reflect all the areas in which I am involved so I have chosen to have membership in several associations that help me in my three specific and different areas of work. As an editor, I find *ESE* helpful because the members who contribute to the journal are all very knowledgeable about editing.

I am not sure if Tom’s editorial reflects a point of view at the EASE Council level that our association needs to go out of its way to (1) attract science “communicators” in other fields besides editing, or (2) needs to try to attract science editors from outside Europe.

Re (1), my personal feeling is that the most helpful association for a science editor is one such as EASE or CSE; for science writers, something like ISWA; and for science communicators, perhaps PCST. And that people like me, with several strings to their bow, could become members of several specialized associations — after all, the membership fees of all these groups are moderate.

Re (2), I was a member of EASE when I lived and worked in Kenya and in the Philippines, conscious of the benefit I could obtain from the relationship — I didn’t see our association as specifically “European” but just based in Europe and with a predominantly European membership. For many years, I was a member of the US-based group with the very

awkward name of Agricultural Communicators in Education but with the wonderfully catchy acronym of ACE. I'd say about three-quarters of its members were based at American land-grant universities with large agricultural research and development faculties. I have never worked in the United States but I found the publications and workshops and conferences of this organization to be very helpful to me at the time when I was heavily involved in communicating the results of agricultural and environmental research. I don't really think that the geographic location in an association's nomenclature would preclude someone outside that location from becoming a member if that person perceived a benefit from joining it, or thought that perhaps he or she might be able to contribute something to it.

I would like to suggest to the EASE Council that, before deciding to change the association's name, they should try to attract those referred to by Tom as the "Many freelancers from outside Europe, particularly from the USA, [who] have expressed reluctance to join EASE because they imagine that mainly European problems are dealt with". Perhaps the association should be considering a public awareness campaign to let potential non-European editors know of the benefits they can obtain from being EASE members.

As for those who would like to join EASE but, says Tom, "are frequently not allowed to become EASE members paid for by their employers or journal", if

EASE can disseminate information about its activities that will convince potential members of the value of joining, then — given the moderate membership fee — surely at least some of them would be willing to dig into their own pockets for the cash? I am retired but continue to do some freelance work in my three fields and I am happy to pay all four association fees for the benefits I receive. I know several people in my associated fields who do the same, and I am sure there are many more.

All of the above is only for consideration in the debate. I'm looking forward to reading all the other points of view. Is it perhaps a suitable discussion for the EASE-Forum?

On an allied matter, re Tom's labelling of "communicators" as a "fairly horrible term" I have to disagree. Among the many people I know who are very happy to label themselves "communicators" by membership in the PCST are science editors, science journalists, science museum and science centre staff, scientists who deal with the public, public information officers for scientific institutions, and academic researchers who study aspects of PCST, plus others who are simply interested in these issues. Many of them are world-renowned in their specific fields.

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Reports of meetings

Editing and scientific "truth"

Eighth General Assembly and Conference of the European Association of Science Editors
8–11 June 2003; Bath, UK

Open access to scholarly publications

(M3, moderator Reme Melero)

A session moderated by Reme Melero addressed the initiative for open access to scientific information and the question of "Who pays?"

Sally Morris, Secretary-General of the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP), an international association of 250 not-for-profit publishers in nearly 30 countries, explained the difference between the "open archives initiative", which allows people to find preprints or published versions of data collections, and "open access", which allows access to institutional materials, such as courses and publications. The costs of the latter are covered by the author, funder or sponsor. The remainder of her presentation covered the copyright, legal and commercial implications of the two initiatives.

In the open archives initiative, the data are owned by the employer, such as a university, although such ownership is often waived for use in research publications. Agreements are reached between the author and the employer to place the data in an institutional archive or to exploit them commercially. Agreements must also be reached with the body that funded the research and with the publisher. Most publishers ask the author to transfer copyright, in order to allow the

publisher to act in cases of plagiarism. About half of the main publishers allow authors to post published articles on their web sites, and about one-third allow posting before publication. Pre-publication posting, which is well established in some disciplines, does not appear to have commercial implications for the publishers; however, if posting of published articles is combined with sophisticated retrieval software (e.g. ParaCite), the viability of the published journal could be undermined.

In the open access initiative, which involves "free" access to data, the costs have to be covered by someone: the consumers, the creators or the sponsors. That will be possible for mainstream journals, keeping pace with research, but not for journals with small grants or high rejection rates. ALPSP is doing research into means of converting journals into viable instruments, despite the current trends in open access.

David Prosser, from the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition Europe (SPARCE), presented a new model for scholarly publication. A new model is needed for a number of reasons. Even the wealthiest institutes cannot buy access to all the