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Difficulties with post-publication peer review

Karen Shashok posted a URL for an open access article entitled, "Post-publication peer review in biomedical journals: overcoming obstacles and disincentives to knowledge sharing" (https://riviste.unimi.it/index.php/roars/article/view/10125). She explained that based on their experience working with authors and insights they had gained in their recent and unexpectedly challenging experience of getting some post-publication peer review published she and her co-authors' offered suggestions in the article for journal editors, publishers, institutions and research evaluation policy makers.

Wendy Hu related her experience in the context of one of the proposals in the article: institutional recognition. She had received an award from an international professional association for the best paper in a post-publication peer review journal in her field but her university's institutional research metrics had excluded this paper. The main reason for excluding the paper was the Australian government's definition of what constitutes research, which drives university performance metrics. One of the criteria is peer review before publication. Wendy pointed out that for individuals choosing where to submit their work this could be a decider. This was especially so if their institution did not have other ways of recognising (eg for promotion) scholarly work that added to the field.

Journals are changing their policies to prior publication

Eva Baranyiová related a case where authors had submitted a manuscript that was posted on their institute's website to a journal for review. The manuscript had not previously been peer-reviewed. While the authors had informed the journal that the article had been presented at a conference no mentioned had been made of the posting on the website and the authors had declared that it had not been published elsewhere. The journal refused to review the manuscript. Foppe van Mil said in such a case his journal would ask the authors to remove the article from the website before it considered the submission provided the depository could only be accessed by people who had logged onto the university network and if the paper could be indexed. His journal would also reject if these conditions were not met or if the authors were unwilling to remove the article.

With the increasing number of articles available as preprints, Pippa Smart noted many journals are changing their prior publication policies. She gave the PLOS journals as one example. These journals encourage authors to post preprints to accelerate the dissemination of research and obtain feedback before formal review. Nevertheless, PLOS ONE will not consider studies for review if they have appeared in peer-reviewed literature. She agreed authors could be confused by prior publication policies as well as it being difficult for journals to choose appropriate wording in their guidelines and pointed to COPE's discussion document on preprints and their request for feedback: https://publicationethics.org/files/u7140/COPE_Preprints_Mar18.pdf

Jadranka Švarc's journal was another that had adopted a new policy, which she set out in her post. Noteworthy is that the journal requires authors to inform the editorial board of disclosures of any earlier versions and that while it will consider manuscripts where abstracts and posters have been presented at conferences it will not consider those published in the conference publications. Christine Graham added that BioRXiv (bioarchive) is a main site for preprints and *Nature* accepts papers posted on the site.

What is a "fellow editor"?

If the reaction to Marjolaine Hamelin's request is anything to judge by, editors are picky about definitions that impinge on themselves. She, a French editor, asked the forum if there is a glossary of editorial functions for scientific journals. In particular, she wanted to know if a "fellow editor" was synonymous with an "associate editor." Denys Wheatley thought there was no need to define "fellow editor" as two editors of equal status are usually called co-editors. But where did the term "fellow editor" come from? asked Andrew Davis. If it was being used by a journal should not the journal be asked what it means? Sylvie Zasser, another French editor, explained her journal uses the term for foreign editorial board members who would not come to quarterly meetings but occasionally be asked to evaluate or select articles for translation into English for thematic issues, but she feared the term was not generally understood. This would seem to be the case as Andrew concluded her description fitted his role as an "associate editor."

Other discussants tackled the difference between placing the word "fellow" before and after "editor." John Loadsman said his journal and some others, eg *Anaesthesia,* provide "editorial fellowships," ie training/experience positions for junior people who were known as "editorial fellows." This was to encourage young people to become involved with the journal in the longer term and develop an interest in publication in general. An "editorial fellow" thus depicted a role. Micheal Newkirk explained further: if someone were to ask a question you did not know the answer to, you could say, «I›m not sure. You could ask a fellow editor.» This simply referred to another professional in the field. By analogy, he would not call a research fellow a «fellow researcher." Research fellow denotes an academic research position while "fellow" in "fellow researcher" is an adjective describing the type of researcher. The inference being that as Marjolaine was referring to a role her "fellow editor" should be called an "editor fellow." Michael Altus suggested a traineeship would be better described as "Editorial Fellow" instead of "Editor Fellow," adding the uppercase "E" and "F" might or might not be necessary. I suggest this would depend on whether the term is being used as a title, when capitals are necessary, or a description of an activity, when lowercase letters are appropriate.

Denys thought defining a role in editing was anyway a bit pretentious, preferring to leave editorial positions as for academic posts: the Editor (Editor-in-Chief) is the person in overall charge (like the head of a department), the Associate Editors are similar to the Editor and can be responsible for all or part of the journal at the behest of the Editor and the Assistant Editors, who may also be well qualified academically, are technical helpers. Denys did, on the other hand, want to see a clearer definition about the work of editorial and publishing personnel. She presumed "editing" covered the whole gamut of the journal but asked where proof reading, copy editing and print editing each start and stop, and where responsibility lies regarding editorial staff and publishing personnel. For example, to what extent are proof reading and copy editing confused?

Axel Ermert might come to Denys' rescue because the topic had long interested him in connection with his work on the International Standard ISO 5127:2017. He said a new edition was planned entitled, "Vocabulary of information and documentation," in which "editing" as well as "document types," database terminology, IMRAD rules, search techniques etc. would be defined.

Are trade names mandatory in an academic paper?

Do authors have to state trade names in a paper which analyses drugs in the same generic class? I asked this question in the context of a preliminary study that found in comparison with others a drug manufactured by one company might evoke unwanted responses. The authors urged further studies be conducted to test their hypothesis (as most papers do). They were not prepared to state brand names because theirs was a basic science study that developed a hypothesis rather than a clinical one intended to influence physicians. The ICMJE recommendations merely say that all drugs should be identified precisely including generic name(s), dose(s), and route(s) of administration. Journals tend not to elaborate in their instructions to authors, except the *NEJM* which requires brand names to be stated.

Arjan Polderman thought if the same molecule was obtained from different sources the sources should be specified, either by trade names or by revealing the manufacturers. Judith Baggot believed a trade name was not needed if the active ingredient(s) was specified. Silvia Maina thought trade names useful as they distinguished between generic drugs that have the same active pharmaceutical ingredient but differ in their excipients, formulation or manufacturing process. Tom Lang appreciated that industry does not like head-to-head comparisons but considered such studies key to evidence-based medicine and thought generic names appropriate unless the brands themselves were compared, when brand names should be given.

These suggestions, however, circumvented the contention of the authors in the case I outlined, that it depended on the type of paper. Foppe proffered that while a research paper should contain the trade name, a commentary pointing out the differences need not. I found a helpful letter published by the editor of *American Family Physician* in which he explained his journal's policy was to use the generic name of drugs throughout the discussion but provide the trade/brand name in parentheses at the first mention. He writes, "This policy is a compromise between the scientific (purist) approach (*the one used by the authors I mentioned*) of always using the generic name, and using the brand name throughout the entire article (https://www.aafp.org/afp/2004/0915/p1031a.html). Overall, it seems whether or not authors need to give brand names is an area where most journal instructions lack clarity.

Privacy and peer review

Pippa Smart started a discussion on whether open/single-blind review contravenes the EU's newly introduced General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) by revealing the authors' names to the reviewers. Would all journals need to change to double-blind review to ensure privacy compliance? Her view was that revealing the authors' names could not be a breach of the regulations as when submitting their article for review authors agree to their names being revealed. This turned out to be the general consensus with Arjan cautioning editors to clearly indicate what their peer review system was so as to allow authors to choose another journal if they did not want their names to be disclosed. To be absolutely on the safe side, Jadranka Sojanovski suggested journals could introduce some kind of consent to disclosure of personal information that would be used in the open peer review processes.

The discussion veered into extoling the desirability of double-blinded review. Vasuprada Iyengar urged editors to redact all indications of where the research was performed from the version submitted for peer review so that review would be truly based on only the facts presented. She contended this might have caught the flaws in Douglas Melton's paper earlier (https://retractionwatch.com/2016/12/27/harvard-biologist-retracts-diabetes-breakthrough-cell/). Michael did not want disclosure of reviewer identity to become mandatory. Both authors and reviewers should be well informed and give their consent, by clicking the appropriate box for example.

Are Brean thought there were good reasons to advocate for double blind peer review, but hoped the GDPR were not one of them as editorial policies should be formed by editors, not lawyers. His journal had had GDPR challenges, mainly concerning distribution and subscriber listings. According to their lawyers, consent was the key word. Are considered obtaining permission from authors to reveal their names to reviewers should be standard procedure for all journals, and also to meet the ideal of transparency in the editorial process.

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