

Medical Editing: How the Editors can help the Reviewers

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Editors of Peer Review medical journals particularly those in less developed countries face numerous problems including lack of financial resources and good quality reviewers.¹ The reviewers they have to work with can be categorized into the following:

Excellent reviewers: They are a few and include those who besides being experts in their respective fields have also learnt the art of medical editing. Not only that they are also keen to help, guide and assist the editors as well as authors. Hence, they do not mind taking extra pains to correct and re-write if need be certain portions of the manuscript. Their comments and suggestions are extremely helpful for the authors to further improve the quality of the manuscripts. They are an asset for any editor and the journal with which they are affiliated.

Good reviewers: They are willing to help the Editor and the authors but would usually confine themselves to making necessary corrections, pointing deficiencies in the manuscripts and make suggestions to help authors revise the manuscripts. They are also helpful for the editors to make a decision regarding the manuscripts whether to accept, reject it or return it to the authors for further improvement.

No so good reviewers: They are not willing to make extra efforts, correcting English language, grammar mistakes and even the quality of their reviews is also not so good to help the editor as well as the authors to further improve the manuscripts.

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However, the editors have to work with all of them and make best use of the available resources. In certain sub-specialties even finding a Reviewer is often a dilemma hence the Editors have to be content with their comments to have an idea as regards the scientific material in the manuscript while for other deficiencies i.e. English language, grammar, statistical analysis etc., the Editors have to either take help of other reviewers or make extra efforts themselves helping, guiding and assisting the authors to improve the manuscript.

On the whole the quality and standard of a journal is dependent on the quality of its editorial team and Reviewers and Referees. The Editors can help the Reviewers in many ways to help improve their editing skills. Since most of the reviewers in these less developed countries perform these duties on honorary basis, the Editors have to be tactful to help the Reviewers ensuring that their inputs do not hurt the Reviewer's ego.

Reviewer's Check List: Most of the medical journals have a check list which the Editors send to the Reviewers along with the manuscript for review. This helps the reviewers in reviewing the manuscript as it is easy, saves the Reviewer's time as they are supposed to just tick the relevant section of Yes or No in response to different questions which are posed to the Reviewers regarding the manuscript under review. At the end, the reviewers are supposed to write a few sentences based on their observations about the manuscript, suggesting how to further improve it, if need be, and finally to accept or reject the manuscript. They may also suggest further revision of the manuscript. This Check list based on certain questions also helps the reviewers to know what the Editors demand from them.

*How to Review the Manuscript:*² The Editors can also help the Reviewers by sharing with them some of the good quality reviews just to help them learn how to review the manuscript. Since most of the reviewers have not attended any Workshop or Course on the subject, most of them learn this through on the job training; hence it can be of immense help for those who are keen to learn.

Passing on the useful tips on Editing: Since the Editors are more actively involved with the process of editing and co-ordination with the Reviewers, Referees, they can pass on to them any useful information they come across on the subject of medical editing. It includes articles, books or websites which contain useful information on the subject.

Organizing Workshops on Peer Review: As pointed out earlier, most of the reviewers in these less developed countries have never attended

any formal course or workshop on peer review and editing, the Editors can organize Hands on Workshops on Peer Review System and Medical Editing. This can help to learn from each other's experience. Pakistan Medical Journalists Association (PMJA) has been quite active in this field and has organized Workshops on Peer Review in different parts of the country.³⁻⁴ which were attended by many editors and reviewers affiliated with various medial and dental journals. Since most of the editors as well reviewers cannot afford to attend any course or workshops on Peer Review and Medical Editing overseas, this is the most cost effective way of learning. Many useful informative books on Peer Review System and medical editing are also available.⁵ Besides benefiting themselves from these resources, the Editors can pass on this information to the reviewers so that those who are interested can benefit.

Making the reviewer's job easy: The editors should do whatever is possible to make the reviewer's job easy. As stated earlier, they should be provided tools which are helpful in reviewing including easy to fill in form in the shape of check-list. The reviewers should be given clear guidelines including what they are expected to do and the deadlines to meet.⁶

Learning through one's own mistakes: Yet another way of helping the Reviewers is to pass on to them the response to their mistakes. Some time what happens is that the authors really work hard through literature search to find out the latest information on the subject before finalizing and submitting the manuscript for publication. It is quite likely that the Reviewer who is asked to review the manuscript may not have time to do literature search or his/her knowledge may not be up to date. Hence, there may be some shortcomings in their comments whereas the authors insist on what they have written and also give appropriate references to prove their point of view. In such situations which are of course very few, the Editors can pass on to the authors response to the queries and objections raised by the Reviewers. It can also help the Reviewers to update themselves and accepting such a manuscript for publication should not become a question of one's ego.

On the whole a good liaison between the Editors and the Reviewers is of great importance not only to learn and share from each other's knowledge and experience but improve the quality and standard of the respective journal with which they are affiliated. Editors and Reviewers are both a valuable asset for a journal hence relationship between them is worth nurturing. Even otherwise reviewers and editors are a core network which can help introduce each other to new authors, new reviewers, new editors, new readers and perhaps new sponsors as well.

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