

EDITORIAL NOTICE

New Editorial Arrangements: More Involvement of Authors and Recognition of Peer-Reviewers

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Background

Peer review will continue as a process to filter unsuitable manuscripts and improve the quality of others prior to publications. It is also being used for academic promotion and grant reviews. Controversy remains about blind reviewing process vs. open system, however, the critical issue is the chronic shortage of reviewers. In a recent editorial, we have affirmed the commitment of the editors of this journal to the principles and currently accepted procedures of peer review of submitted manuscripts being widely perceived as the cornerstone of assuring quality in academic journalism (1-2). However, we have shared our concerns on the problem of not getting reviewers motivated enough to accept this task and respond in a timely fashion (1,3). We have identified that the problem is not unique to “emerging journals”, those that are based in the developing world (even nominally on occasions) or those which have no impact factor to quote yet. Apparently, established

(indexed) journals too seem to suffer the same albeit at an obviously lower order of magnitude (4).

The issue

There is obviously a serious shortage of reviewers! Acting as a reviewer requires spending a considerable amount of time in reading manuscripts and generating a more or less lengthy list of comments about all aspects of a given manuscript (4).

Conventionally reviewers get no academic credit or financial compensation for this demanding job. Searching for reviewers has become a time-consuming task with long delays to formulate an editorial decision based on the peer-reviewers assessment. New arrangements are needed to recognize editors and reviewers on individual basis for the work they are doing as essential components of medical publish process.

In an attempt to reduce or resolve this problem, an increasing number of online journals started a new editing practice. This entailed that the editors and peer reviewers are formally included on the individual articles that they review and or edit alongside the authors. These three classes of contributors to the final outcome are clearly identified with their roles. We think this practice is rational and fair and should be encouraged and embraced by more journals. We firmly believe in this day and age when “academic productivity” is being closely scrutinized, enabling clinicians and academics to list objectively their contributions detailed as authorship, editorship and peer reviewer-ship more readily verifiable (1,4). This will also focus on reviewer-ship as a serious academic activity.

The new arrangements

Ibnosina Journal of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences sustain its good practices that existed since its conception, in particular:

1. We will continue to uphold the principles of peer review as the sole basis for selecting unsolicited manuscripts for publications.
2. The editors will continue evaluate all submissions and continue to decline manuscripts that are clearly outside the scope of the journal or when the manuscript has obvious flaws that make it not suitable for publication and thus we will save the time and efforts of our willing reviewers.
3. We will continue to recruit potential reviewers by personal invitations of those identified by the editorial team by virtue of their contributions to the international and regional literature. We will increase our focus on recruitment of young and aspiring colleagues and training them to become the peer reviewers of the future. We think it is our mission as well as others to recruit younger reviewers and invest in training them to overcome the shortage and continue the peer review process.

However, from the current issue onwards, two major editorial changes have been introduced:

1. Submitting authors will be engaged more in the publication process. This will be by asking them to provide names, affiliations and contact details of potential reviewers for their manuscripts. This will now be integral component

of the submission process. Although this is not enabled technically in the web site yet, it will be made very clear in the initial editorial communication that acknowledges the online submission. We believe including the authors to suggest potential reviewers will increase the base number of reviewers and may speed the process. Last week, the corresponding authors of all outstanding submissions were sent an editorial communication giving them the same opportunity to nominate suitable reviewers. Naturally, it remains the duty and privilege of the editors to decide on the final choice of the peer reviewers for individual articles.

2. Greater recognition of our peer reviewers and editors is expressed more formally. Although, we will continue to recognize our peer reviewers by the conventional listing at the end of the volume/year but in addition, we also recognize their efforts in the articles on an individual basis. At this stage, the early phases of the review process will remain blinded to both authors and reviewers and reviewers will only be disclosed at the final stage of production. We chose to place them at the end of the manuscript for simplicity. Solicited submissions will not be subjected to peer reviewing and these will be clearly indicated as such.

Finally, as we reflect on the problem of shortage of reviewers' availability and willingness, we do like to hear from our reviewers about our journal and their ideas to improve our performance and speed of the review process. As we announce our new arrangements to involve authors more actively in the nomination of possible reviewers, and our new plans of recognition of reviewers on individual basis, we reiterate our prior plea to all potential reviewers to keep their support to journal.

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