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Editorial Assessment and Processing

Richard M. Glass

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The principal goals of editing biomedical publications are to select, improve, and disseminate information that will advance the art and science of the discipline covered by the publication. For example, biomedical publications are a major source of information for the improvement of medical care. In addition to initial transmission to readers at the time of publication, information from journal articles is often carried by the public media. Published articles influence educators and opinion leaders, who transmit the information to many persons who do not read the original publications. Medical journal articles can also be subsequently accessed by clinicians and researchers seeking information about particular topics. Such searches are facilitated by online search engines (see 25.0, Resources) and provide the information essential to practicing evidence-based medicine,¹ in which patient-care decisions are informed by acquiring and assessing the relevant medical literature. These myriad uses of biomedical literature indicate the importance of the procedures to improve quality involved in editorial assessment and processing...

Editorial Processing

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Editorial processing refers to the processing of manuscripts after acceptance in preparation for publication (Figure). With the development of electronic document processing, the term manuscript has moved increasingly far from its handwritten origins to refer to a prepublication document, whether it happens to be a hard-copy typescript or an electronic file. Manuscript submission, peer review, editing, processing, and tracking are now commonly performed electronically. A major technical issue for many publishers is the need to efficiently process content for multiple publication outputs, such as print, Web, reprints, and personal digital assistants (PDAs). The use of electronic markup languages such

Editorial Assessment

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The assessment process (Figure) consists of 2 phases: editorial review and peer review. In editorial review, editors first assess submissions for their overall quality and appropriateness for the publication's readership. Some manuscripts are rejected on the basis of this editorial "triage." Manuscripts that pass this initial step go on to the peer review phase. Peer review (see , Peer Review) involves evaluation by experts who are "peers" of the authors with regard to knowledge about the topic of the submission, and may also include evaluation by expert statistical reviewers (see , Statistical Review). The integrity of the editorial assessment

Assessment Criteria

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Two major criteria are central to the evaluation of manuscripts submitted for publication: importance and quality. Importance involves an assessment of whether the work • Represents a scientific advance (recognizing that individual articles usually convey only small advances) • Has clinical relevance (if the journal is to be read and the information used by practicing clinicians) • Presents new information • Will be of interest to readers An additional component of importance is editorial priority, a composite judgment made by the editor regarding the value of a particular submission relative to other submissions under evaluation at the same time, weighed

Editorial Decisions

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On the basis of evaluations by the editors and peer reviewers, submitted manuscripts are either rejected or returned to authors with suggestions for improvement through revision. Authors should realize that a request for revision does not guarantee acceptance, because revised manuscripts are subject to editorial review and may also have additional peer review. Several rounds of review and revision may occur before a final decision is reached. Acceptance of manuscripts expressing viewpoints, perspectives, or opinions may be based solely on editorial review, but reports of original data and other major articles almost always undergo peer review, statistical review, and revision

Statistical Review

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Reviewers with expertise in statistics (including the assessment of study design and research methods) are essential to evaluate the quality of original research reports. Such reviewers may serve as paid consultants to a journal. Empirical studies have shown that statistical review can be very helpful in selecting and improving scientific reports for publication. Unfortunately, many published research articles are flawed by weaknesses in study design and methods that should have been detected by review or, far better, prevented by appropriate statistical consultation in planning the research before the manuscript was written. |

Appealing a Rejection

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If a paper is rejected, authors occasionally ask for reconsideration, usually because they believe the reviewers or the editor have misjudged the importance and quality of the submission. This situation can be viewed in 2 different ways. On the one hand, peer review and editorial decisions are based on fallible human judgments. Mistakes can be made, so perhaps the rejected manuscript merits reconsideration. On the other hand, heeding appeals for reconsideration may fulfill the adage “The squeaky wheel gets the grease.” Reconsideration of papers solely on the basis of author complaints could be unfair to authors who have equally legitimate

Postpublication Review

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Evaluation does not end with publication. Postpublication review includes letters to the editor that identify flaws or additional implications, rapid online responses to published articles, efforts to replicate the work, and the experience of clinicians in applying the information in practice. Such evaluations are at least as important as prepublication review. Electronic journals should link from articles to the letters related to them to facilitate retrieval. Editors should also perform a quality review of each published issue of their journal, looking for problems in content and format that can be corrected or improved in subsequent issues (see , Ethical and

Proofreading

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Composition, Page Makeup, and Web Content

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