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Editorial

Scholarly publishing depends on peer reviewers

Fernando FERNANDEZ-LLIMOS, Pharmacy Practice 2017 peer reviewers.
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Abstract:
The peer-review crisis is posing a risk to the scholarly peer-reviewed journal system. Journals have to ask many potential peer reviewers to obtain a minimum acceptable number of peers accepting reviewing a manuscript. Several solutions have been suggested to overcome this shortage. From reimbursing for the job, to eliminating pre-publication reviews, one cannot predict which is more dangerous for the future of scholarly publishing. And, why not acknowledging their contribution to the final version of the article published? PubMed created two categories of contributors: authors [AU] and collaborators [IR]. Why not a third category for the peer-reviewer?

Keywords: Peer Review; Peer Review, Research; Open Access Publishing; Periodicals as Topic

In recent years, we have attended to major changes in scholarly publishing. Not so many years ago, journals printed the issues they published and distributed them by postal mail. We tend to think that this distribution targeted a reduced number of people who, somehow, paid for all the costs. Payment could be made through subscriptions, individual or institutional, or by becoming affiliated with the scientific society that published the journal. In fact, however, this is not completely true. Many of these scientific or professional societies considered publishing to be their social responsibility and published journals without any for-profit business model: the so-called gratis journals.

The advent of new technologies, such as the internet, the PDF, cheap formatting tools, and free journal management systems, have made it possible for scientific and professional societies to keep publishing their journals but also for new societies to begin the adventure of publishing for free. Gratis journals are frequently and purposefully ignored in the open access debate. Of the 9,699 journals indexed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) in 2017, 6,827 have no article processing charges. They are gratis journals published according to a collaborative publishing philosophy.

However, gratis journals live 'between two fires': subscription journals and APC journals. Both are owned by large corporations that publish under a for-profit business model. Many of the discussions in journalology are biased in that they take into account only these two main types of business-oriented publishers.

One of these hot topics is also one of the main problems in today's scholarly publishing: peer review. Although peer review may have a very long history[1], this process was systematically implemented in publishing only in the 1960s.[2] From that time forward, we consider "peer-reviewed journals" as synonymous with quality journals. However, we are facing a massive crisis in publishing: editors face a huge problem when trying to find high-quality peer reviewers for a manuscript. Editors have to ask many potential reviewers in order to obtain two or three who accept the task. The other potential reviewers usually decline because they are too busy at that moment. Authors should be aware that this lengthy process is responsible for the publication delay that annoys them so much.[3,4]

The peer-review crisis is posing a risk to the scholarly peer-reviewed journal system. One can find an amazing number of articles predicting the future of peer review. Publishers have also produced a report entitled "What might peer review look like in 2030".[5] It seems that, years ago, reviewers accepted collaboration for the sake of contributing to the dissemination of scientific knowledge. Then, giving credit to the reviewers became crucial. In addition, more recently, the idea of reimbursing reviewers for their service is frequently raised.[6] The absence of pre-publication review has also been presented as a solution to the peer-review crisis.

If we want the paying-to-review model, we have to consider who should pay. Copiello calculated the costs of peer review and suggested a "reward scheme for peer review".[7] He suggested that subscription journal publishers and publishers charging APC should reallocate a portion of their "two-digit profit rates". How can we control this? At the end of the day, subscribers and authors would end up paying for the peer review. And, again, we would be ignoring the existence of gratis journals.

The elimination of pre-publication peer-review is an extreme solution that has also been suggested. A post-publication review system is commonly used in some disciplines such as physics, where a researcher publishes an idea that is then critiqued by colleagues. However, a major difference between physics and

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medical or pharmaceutical fields exists: in our areas, we make decisions that affect patients and healthcare systems based on what is published. In these cases, while peer review is not a guarantee, it helps to reduce errors not only in publications but also in clinical practice.[8]

Before supporting these new systems, a thorough evaluation of their consequences in different areas should be conducted through rigorous studies. Rennie recently reminded us that "any advertised advantages of new arrangements are unsupported assertions".[9]

The shortage of peer reviewers makes no sense for many reasons. The term 'peer' is the key in this rationale. Peer means colleague, or equal. Authors and reviewers are essentially the same people with different tasks. In fact, a good peer review represents an enormous contribution to a good paper, so the contribution of peer reviewers should be recognized in the final version of the paper. The first barrier to giving credit is the maintenance of the anonymized review. While many journals are moving to open the review process, or testing the feasibility[10] of doing so, others have started offering the ability to conceal the process even more.[11] Solutions such as Publons (publons.com) were created to register assignments completed by reviewers, and curriculum platforms such as ORCID (orcid.org) are now importing these records. If we take into consideration that a peer reviewer is a contributor to the final version of the paper, why not acknowledge that contribution in the same way that we acknowledge collaborators in PubMed? Since March 2008, NLM includes the names of the individual collaborators that make up a collective authorship in a field called 'Investigator'.[12] Thus, NLM currently differentiates two levels of contributorship to an article: authors [AU] and investigators [IR] (displayed as collaborators). Why not include a third level of contributorship, the reviewer?

Pharmacy Practice wants to recognize the extremely important role of reviewers by publishing an editorial in the first issue of each year with a collective authorship including all the reviewers that contributed during the previous year.

Pharmacy Practice 2017 peer reviewers

Two reviews

Andrew D. Berti, University of Wisconsin, United States

Denise Yeung, Parkland Health & Hospital System, United States

Kazeem B. Yusuff, King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia

Mohamed E. El Zowalaty, Jazan University, Saudi Arabia

One review

Eyob D. Adane, Ohio Northern University, United States

Sinaa Al-Aqeel, King Saud University, Saudi Arabia

Ali Azeez Al-Jumaili, University of Iowa, United States

Edita Alili-Idrizi, State University of Tetovo, Macedonia

Marija Anđelković, Sports Medicine Association of Serbia, Serbia

Anil Aranha, Wayne State University Health Center, United States

Mohammad Arief, UCSI University, Malaysia

Wiwat Arkaravichien, Khon Kaen University, Thailand

Xavier Armoiry, University of Warwick, United Kingdom

Omar F. Attarabeen, Marshall University, United States

Nehad Ayoub, Jordan University of Science and Technology, Jordan

Beata V. Bajorek, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia

Paul Beninger, Tufts University, United States

Sarah J. Billups, Kaiser Permanente Colorado, United States

Jane F. Bowen, University of the Sciences, United States

Carla Bouwmeester, Northeastern University, United States

Patrick Campbell, University of Arizona, United States

Vincent Chan, RMIT University, Australia

Sharon E. Connor, University of Pittsburgh, United States

Larry H. Danziger, University of Illinois at Chicago, United States

Omar T. Dawood, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia

Mark Dunnenberger, NorthShore University Health System, United States

Selwa Elrouby, Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust, United Kingdom

Souhiela Fakih, Chapman University, United States

Rana K. Abu Farha, Applied Science University, Jordan

Isabel V. Figueiredo, University of Coimbra, Portugal

Nazanin Foroutan, Kerman University of Medical Sciences, Iran

Lauren E. Forsythe, UC Davis Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital, United States

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Dan Friesner, North Dakota State University, United States

Kylie Funk, University of Minnesota, United States

Caroline Gaither, University of Minnesota, United States

Casey E. Gallimore, University of Wisconsin, United States

Vincent Gan, Parkway Pantai, Malaysia

Beate H. Garcia, University of Tromsø, Norway

Jessica L. Gaskins, North Carolina State University, United States

Miguel A. Gastelurrutia, University of Granada, Spain

Justin Gatwood, University of Tennessee, United States

Cheryl K. Genord, St. Joseph Mercy Hospital, United States

Eric Gilliam, University of Colorado, United States

Nancy Hope Goodbar, Presbyterian College, United States

Maxine Gossell-Williams, University of the West Indies, Jamaica

Quinn Grundy, University of Sydney, Australia

Line Guénette, Université Laval, Canada

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James D. Hoehns, University of Iowa, United States

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