ISMTE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF MANAGING AND TECHNICAL EDITORS

EON
Editorial Office News

June 2008

COLUMN: *Editorial*

And the Winner Is . . .

EON!

Submitted by ISMTE Vice President, Taylor Bowen, EON, Editorial Office News, was chosen by the Board of Directors as the new name for the ISMTE newsletter.

I extend my sincere thanks to those who submitted suggestions for the newsletter-naming contest and appreciate your participation.

The ISMTE Board of Directors took this decision very seriously, feeling strongly the newsletter represents the Society and its brand should appropriately reflect our Society today and as it grows.

As Vice President, Taylor did not feel it would be appropriate to accept the prize for the contest; so all the participants' names were placed in a hat and one was drawn.

Congratulations to Nicki Salcedo who won a free copy of Irene Hames' book *Peer Review and Manuscript Management*.

Kristen Overstreet
ISMTE Newsletter Editor

COLUMN: *President's Message*

Update on the Society

From the President - Jason Roberts, PhD

I got in way too deep writing my article on rating, encouraging and educating reviewers that can be found in this issue of the ISMTE newsletter, so I'll be brief this month with the President's Column.

This is the first newsletter on our new monthly schedule reflecting the demands to provide content more regularly and also to make things more 'bite-sized' in the hope you will read from cover-to-cover. It is also the first newsletter with restricted access. Going forward, though we will leave an open archive of material on the www.ismte.org website, we are going to restrict access to the newsletter and other resources to members only.

Spreading the word

ISMTE is in the process of forming a Promotions Committee

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In this issue . . .

Article

Conflict of Interest: An Editor's View

by Ira F. Salkin, PhD, F(AAM)
***Treasurer, ISMTE; Editor-in-Chief,* Medical Mycology**
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In the last few years, as we have moved from snail mail and hard copies of manuscripts to e-mail and electronic submissions, various ethical issues related to the publication of scholarly journals have found new emphasis. I believe in large part this is attributable to the rapid adoption of electronic publishing and to the ever-increasing avenues for electronic communication. For example, the only way plagiarism could previously be detected was if authors had the misfortune of having their manuscripts evaluated by editors or peer reviewers whose works they plagiarized. Today, authors with such a bent to use the work of others have ready access to almost any earlier published paper in their fields; but by the same token, editors, peer reviewers and editorial office staff can employ one or more commercially available software programs to detect plagiaristic activities.

Another ethical issue, conflict of interest, has recently moved front and center in the United States with the publication, on April 18, 2007, of the National Library of Medicine's (NLM) "fact sheet" on this topic. In part, the NLM stated (the full contents of the fact sheet can be found at http://www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/facsheets/factsheets.ntml):

If a supplement is sponsored by an outside organization, or reports on a conference or other activity that was sponsored by an outside organization, or is devoted to a special topic that is in any way related to a proprietary product, then the articles in the supplement ***will not be cited and indexed for MEDLINE*** [emphasis added] *unless the supplement includes the disclosure information that is described below. An "outside organization" does not include the organization for which the journal is the publishing* ***organ*** *(e.g. the American Academy of Dermatology and the Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology), nor does it include any U.S. or non-U.S. government agency.*

Disclosure information must include any financial relationship that each author has with the sponsoring organization and the for-profit interests the organization represents, and with any for-profit product discussed or implied in the text of the article. When there is special or guest editorship for the supplement, then the same disclosure information must appear for each editor. For authors, it is preferable that the disclosure information appear within the paginated text of the article, and not elsewhere in the issue. (Note that for supplements published in 2008 and later, it will be required that author disclosure statements appear within the paginated text of the article.)

This would seem to be limited to those supplements funded by special interests which occasionally appear in biomedical journals, e.g., a supplement on a new therapeutic drug sponsored by the drug's manufacturer. However, the fact sheet goes on to stipulate:

The policy will also apply to supplements containing the proceedings of a conference, congress or other type of meeting

Conflict of Interest continued

sponsored or financed by an outside group.

Therefore, the NLM's requirements for disclosure of conflicts of interest would seem to apply to journals that attempt to augment their finances by publishing meeting proceedings. Put another way, if the journal with which you are associated is not owned by a professional society, then that special issue you might have been planning to publish on the proceedings from the "Indiana Jones" conference will need disclosure statements included in the forward of the issue acknowledging all sponsors of the meeting. In addition, all authors must include similar statements in their manuscripts.

However, this interpretation is based upon the example provided by the NLM with reference to the meaning of an "outside organization". The Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology cited in the fact sheet is owned by the American Academy of Dermatology, but is actually published by Elsevier. Therefore, one may possibly extend this to other journals, such as the one I edit, which are owned, but not physically published, by professional organizations. Unfortunately, the exact meaning of "publishing organ" remains obscure, save to NLM attorneys.

Furthermore, it's an open question as to whether this requirement would have resulted in the disclosure of the conflict of interest situation reported in a story by the *New York Times*[a] and recently posted on the ISMTE website. In brief, the authors of a report published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* (NEJM) on the use of CT scans in the detection of lung cancer did disclose the research was funded, in part, by the *Foundation for Lung Cancer: Early Detection, Prevention and Treatment.* Since the paper was not part of a supplement or special issue, the authors had to meet only the NEJM disclosure policy. Because they did include the Foundation as a source of funding in their acknowledgments, they appeared to be within the journal's standards. However, as the *Times* noted, the Foundation received almost all of its funding from the Liggett Group, makers of several brands of cigarettes. Even if this paper had been part of a supplement, the authors would still have met the NLM standards by simply acknowledging the Foundation as one of the sources of funding.

Unfortunately, this matter has been complicated by the fact the NLM has seemingly retroactively applied its new policy. PubMed has refused to index individual articles that have appeared in supplements, if not entire supplements, despite the fact they were published in 2006. This is at least four months prior to the NLM's notification of its position on conflict of interest. Since this action directly affects the publication records of authors, and since publications are one of the key elements in tenure and promotion reviews, it has become a matter of great concern to those who have contributed to the supplements. Furthermore, failure to index these separate publications may directly affect the 2007 impact factors of the journals. While the counsel offices of several publishers have formally requested the NLM to reverse its retroactive enforcement,

[a] G. Harris. Cigarette company paid for lung cancer study. The New York Times, March 26, 2008.

Conflict of Interest *continued*

currently this matter remains unresolved.

If you question whether any of this would affect your journal or the operations of your editorial office, then consider the *Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals*, updated in October, 2007 and published by the *International Committee of Medical Journal Editors* (http://www.icmje.org/#conflicts). Item II.D.3 (this always reminds me of a "star date" from Star Trek) discusses "potential conflicts of interest related to commitments of Editors, **Journal Staff and Reviewers**' [emphasis added]. In this section one finds the following:

Reviewers must disclose to editors any conflicts of interest that could bias their opinions of the manuscript, and they should disqualify themselves from reviewing specific manuscripts if they believe it to be appropriate. As in the case of authors, silence on the part of reviewers concerning potential conflicts may mean either that such conflicts exist that they have failed to disclose, or that conflicts do not exist. ***Reviewers must therefore also be asked to state explicitly whether conflicts do or do not exist. Reviewers must not use knowledge of the work, before its publication, to further their own interests*** [emphasis added].

Editors who make final decisions about manuscripts must have no personal, professional, or financial involvement in any of the issues they might judge. ***Other members of the editorial staff, if they participate in editorial decisions*** [emphasis added], *must provide editors with a current description of their financial interests (as they might relate to editorial judgments) and disqualify themselves from any decisions where they have a conflict of interest. Editorial staff must not use the information gained through working with manuscripts for private gain. Editors should publish regular disclosure statements about potential conflicts of interests related to the commitments of journal staff.*

Unfortunately, the ICMJE does not provide a clear definition of "participate in editorial decisions" and as always, the devil is in such details. At first blush it would seem to refer to those who make the determinations to accept or reject manuscripts. But then again, does the submission of manuscripts to reviewers and collating the reviewers' evaluations constitute participation in the decision-making on the fate of manuscripts? Do you make recommendations of any sort to your editors concerning the manuscripts that have been submitted to your journals? Have you ever indicated to your editors that manuscripts appear to be outside of the scope of your journals? If the broad definition of participation is adopted, could authors of a manuscript claim their report on drug X from company Y was rejected due to your financial interests (e.g., mutual funds) in a competing brand of drug? To paraphrase a very old axiom, "Hell hath no fury like an author whose paper has been rejected." In light of these recent ICMJE recommendations, will journals adopt a conservative approach by requiring some or all editorial office staff to file financial statements with editors or other parties so as to avoid even the appearance of conflicts of interest? Taking

Conflict of Interest *continued*

this to what might be considered an illogical conclusion, will editorial staff members be required to recuse themselves from processing manuscripts when the subjects appear to conflict with their financial interests?

Another example of the implications of the ICMJE recommendations would be their effect on the recruitment of editors, associate editors and most importantly, peer reviewers. I believe we are now encountering serious problems in securing the services of competent peer reviewers. In the case of the journal I serve, it is very unusual to be able to obtain positive responses from the first two peer reviewers invited to evaluate a manuscript. I can predict with some degree of certainty our recruitment efforts will become infinitely more complicated if we now were to ask these individuals "to state explicitly whether conflicts do or do not exist" in their reviewing of manuscripts. Since I also act as a peer reviewer for other journals, I would decline to review manuscripts if required to stipulate any conflict of interest in evaluating manuscripts. Similarly, instituting such a requirement would have a serious negative impact on the recruitment of editors and associate editors, especially since in many society-owned journals these individuals receive no salary or any other form of compensation for their efforts.

We recently introduced a policy in the journal I edit requiring all authors to include in the acknowledgments of their manuscripts a statement as to conflict of interest in the performance of their investigations. This applies to papers submitted for publication in the journal and its supplement and special issues. I realize as the journal is owned by a professional organization we would appear to be exempt from the NLM requirements. However, given the apparent vagaries of the NLM's decision-making process, this action appeared to be needed to ensure the continued indexing of the journal and its contents. After all, it is not beyond the realm of possibility for the NLM to extend its policy in the near future to supplements or special issues published by any organization and even to the publication of all scholarly periodicals.

I have not, at least as of yet, instituted the ICMJE recommendations related to conflicts of interests for those involved in the editorial processing of manuscripts. I believe they would cause havoc in the journal operations. In addition, their adoption would impede, if not make impossible, securing the services of competent editors, associate editors and peer reviewers. Furthermore, I believe these recommendations would require significant resources to initiate and use, are virtually unenforceable, and appear to imply guilt without proof to the contrary.

If you would like to review other perspectives on conflict of interest, I suggest you consult the Committee on Publication Ethics' website, http://www.publicationethics.org.uk and the site of the World Association of Medical Editors at http://www.wame.org.

ISMTE: Adding Structure Update

ISMTE is pleased to announce the (final) final composition of its initial Board of Directors:

Board Officers:

Jason Roberts	President
Taylor Bowen	Vice-President
Jennifer Deyton	Secretary
Ira Salkin	Treasurer

Board Directors:

Elizabeth Blalock
Gary Bryan
Dianne Dixon
Irene Hames
Kristen Overstreet

COLUMN: *President's Message*

President's Message *continued*

with the associated development of a promotion plan. This involves spreading the word about ISMTE around the scholarly publishing industry. It also involves improving internal communication with the membership. I am determined to ensure ISMTE does not fall into the trap of contacting you only at renewals and meeting announcement time, accompanied by the sporadic dispatch of a membership bulletin. The whole point of ISMTE is to get people talking. Which reminds me, if you have not already done so, please do activate your discussion forum account and start participating. On the ISMTE homepage we will post an update each week of topics under discussion. I thoroughly enjoyed participating in discussions on rewarding reviewers and what's it like where you work. If you need help or more information about the forum, contact Katy Ladbrook at katy.ladbrook@gmail.com.

As members, all of us can help raise the profile of ISMTE by spreading the word…indeed that's how some of us came to join. We have prepared some sample text that summarizes what ISMTE is about. If you would like to use that to forward to people you think might be interested in joining or, if appropriate, to any other groups you belong to, contact me at journal@ahsnet.org.

International Peer Review Congress

September 2009, in Vancouver (one of the most beautiful cities in the world if you've not been), will witness the opening of the VI International Congress on Peer Review and Biomedical Publication. The Congress is an important forum for sharing data on a variety of topics ranging from the mechanisms of peer review, ethical considerations, and specific issues such as authorship, image and data presentation quality, and misconduct. ISMTE intends to have a presence at this meeting by developing what we believe will be some important data on a variety of issues relating to peer review. ISMTE Board member Gary Bryan is heading a committee that will finalize some research hypotheses and submit them to the Congress organizers by September. If you would like to get involved or have ideas you are interested in researching, please let Gary know at gbryan@bmj.com. ISMTE sees researching peer review as a critical role the Society can play in enabling the publishing industry to make more informed decisions about the whole peer review process.

All the best for the next month.

Jason

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COLUMN: *ISMTE BIOGRAPHIES*

Katy Ladbrook is the Moderator for the Discussion Forum

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I attended two art schools and my degree was in illustration, which might seem like an unusual route into publishing, but I was particularly interested in political cartoons and editorial illustration, which got me into page layout design and print process.

I am the editorial manager for *Age and Ageing*, journal of the British Geriatric Society. I was previously an account manager at a marketing company but much prefer the nature and pace of publishing.

When I first took this job in 2002, it was as the editorial assistant, with the support of a full-time administrator. The role has changed a great deal over the last 4 ½ years. My remit has grown; I don't need an admin assistant; and I have re-designed the editorial process to allow remote working. This means that I can offer better, more continuous management of the editorial office.

In my spare time I volunteer for a few IndyMedia projects (www.indymedia.org.uk), which include moderating newswires, discussion forums and editing websites and newsletters. I recently tried my hand at writing and have had a few articles published on gardening and environmental issues.

I hope to see you in the ISMTE Forum (http://groups.google.com/group/ismte-discussion-forum).

If you have not done so already, come along and say hello!

A Note on English

ISMTE aims to be a truly international society. English will represent our lingua franca but we would like to stress that in materials published in this newsletter or online variations idiomatic usage and spelling should reflect the origins of the author. No one version of English is preferred over the other.

Thank you!

ISMTE would like to thank the following companies for sponsoring memberships: Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford University Press, Sage, and the American Chemical Society.

Column: *Tips & Tricks for Best Practice in the Editorial Office*

Efforts to improve the quality of reviews – part 1: rating, rewarding and educating reviewers

Jason Roberts, Managing Editor

Headache; Journal of Sexual Medicine (journal@ahsnet.org)

This is the first of a two-part "Tips and Tricks" column exploring various methods to improve review performance – techniques you may be able to take back to your editor-in-chief or editorial boards for possible implementation. A few studies have been conducted to date that either examine techniques to enhance reviewer performance or measure improvement as a result of specific strategies, and it does seem efforts to improve peer review have met with limited success.[1]

In this particular column I will look at some simple process-oriented approaches that could potentially lead to an improvement in the general level of all peer review. This particular article will focus on establishing a method to direct manuscripts to proven top reviewers; rewarding reviewers after you secure their services; and, finally, simple steps to control the content of reviews returned. As ISMTE establishes itself, it would behoove us to consider a complete range of strategies and devise methods (qualitative and quantitative) to measure improvement.

Rating: Evaluating the evaluators

When a review is returned, editors can take an important step that will assist in future rounds of peer review: rate the quality and/or timeliness of the returned review. Repeated rating of reviews develops a performance portrait of individual reviewers – the serially poor are then exposed by a simple qualitative measure. With some online peer review systems you can then present this data as a reviewer score, which is a simple mean average of previous scores. The obvious strategy is to invite those with strong scores. Though there can be variance, typically reviewers are consistent in the quality of their evaluations, so stronger performers will continue to deliver quality reviews. To illustrate the point, 46% of reviewers (n = 30) for the *Journal of Sexual Medicine* (*JSM*) who completed 10 or more reviews between January 1st 2007 and May 27th 2008 (N = 65) either scored perfectly or had only 1 out of 10 reviews that did not score perfectly. Only 26% of the *JSM's* most consistent reviewers (10 or more submitted reviews) received ratings below the perfect score on 3 or more reviews.

Our approach at *JSM* is, admittedly, not very sophisticated. We simply ask the associate editors in charge of selecting reviewers and posting recommendations to the editor-in-chief to rate a review as follows (a fairly standard template many of you may employ):

Timeliness

3 - Review was on time
2 - Review was slightly delayed
1 - Review was severely delayed

Quality Assessment

3 - Review was highly relevant
2 - Review was sufficient
1 - Review was below average.

1 Callaham ML, Knopp RK, Gallagher EJ. Effect of Written Feedback by Editors on Quality of Reviews. JAMA. 2002; 287:2781-2783.

Presently we do not (but should!) employ some basic criteria to define what is meant by timeliness and, especially, quality assessment. Clearly some editors might have more personal stringent criteria for judging reviews returned, and standardization of the grading is required. That said, we feel the benefits outweigh the negatives.

JSM does not share the ratings with the reviewers. We do send each of the reviewers of a manuscript all of the reviewer comments for that manuscript, but we do not provide feedback on those comments. Instead the ratings remain an internal guide on who stands out within our pool of reviewers. Consequently we steer manuscripts to the reviewers who perform best for us. Twenty-seven percent of all reviews completed in the time period referenced above were completed by those individuals who have either retained a perfect rating across 10 or more reviews or scored a perfect rating in 90% of their reviews completed (again completing 10 or more reviews). The editor-in-chief believes that by returning repeatedly to reviewers with proven consistency, he is able to ensure a high quality peer review process.

Incentives

Definitive evidence is not yet forthcoming that rewarding a reviewer makes a difference. However, for those so motivated, incentives may elicit superior-quality future evaluations by rewarding such efforts. There is definitely a research project that needs to be conducted measuring the impact of simple incentives. Indeed, an interesting research question would be: typically how many reviews do reviewers complete on average and for how many journals? With the volume of reviews undertaken across a broad range of titles, is there a problem of these incentives getting lost? A scientific measurement of incentives should prove revelatory, but don't plan to wait for the results. If you can readily implement some simple strategies then it seems like a good idea to do it – acknowledgment of work done is a basic courtesy after all, and it certainly cannot harm your prospects of securing reviews in the future.

Anecdotally, it does seem reviewers appreciate some form of recognition. The ISMTE Discussion Forum recently witnessed a debate on rewarding reviewers.[2] Some of the recognition/rewards practiced by editorial offices include:

- Listing reviewers in one issue per year;
- Identifying top reviewers and offering publisher discounts, free subscriptions, free color in their next accepted article, free online access for a limited period of time;
- Returning the favor by offering personal assistance in some way;
- Letters of recognition, certificates recognizing work completed;
- Inclusion in an "official" list of reviewers - those still building up their *curriculum vitae* may be anxious to state they are part of a pool of reviewers for a journal;

2 International Society of Managing and Technical Editors. Discussion Forum: Rewarding Reviewers. www.ismte.org. Accessed 27th May 2008.

- Inviting the 10 most productive reviewers to the editorial board meeting;
- Promoting consistently strong performers to become members of the editorial board.

The recent Publishing Research Consortium (PRC) on peer review established that by far and away the most commercial rewards for reviewing reported by editors were reviewer receptions at conferences and waivers of publication charges. In both cases 39% of editors reported offering that particular reward. [3]

Payment of reviewers is almost non-existent in medical and science titles; the PRC report suggested 9% of humanities and social science titles paid for reviews.[3] Discussions amongst the World Association of Medical Editors seemed to imply payment of reviewers made no overall impact on the quality.[4] If payments were made for reviews, these were typically directed to statistical consultants or technical editors.

There is some scholarly debate that greater professional credit should be given for the effort of reviewing, such as Continuing Medical Education Credit for medical titles. Maybe peer review will become as important a part of graduate training as lessons in research methods. Training is often provided by assisting a research supervisor to complete a review. Linda Miller, executive editor of *Nature* and recent keynote speaker at the ISMTE North American launch meeting in Baltimore, contends, “If graduate schools required this type of critique as a regular part of some ‘recent literature’ courses, the quality of reviewing would only be increased.” [5] These are clearly debates presently beyond our scope, but they do reflect on-going concerns surrounding the quality of peer review and the most appropriate methods to address deficient reviews.

I’ve focused solely on positive incentives, but logically, incentives can also be based on fearful consequences. Hauser and Fehr, in an effort to provoke debate, suggest imposing punishments on late reviewers in an effort to improve timeliness. They suggest penalizing a late reviewer by keeping in editorial limbo (i.e. withholding a decision) the next paper they author and submit for twice as long (in days) as they were late on a review! [6]

Regulating the quality of reviews

I have examined a simple method for controlling the quality of reviews returned by steering manuscripts to strong performing reviewers. I also discussed the possibility that incentives may generate enough goodwill to ensure reviewers apply maximum effort in their evaluations. There are also some systematic steps that can be taken to force reviewers into meeting certain uniform standards, adding another layer of control to the quality of reviews returned.

3 Publishing Research Consortium. Peer review in scholarly journals: Perspective of the scholarly community – an international study. www.publishingresearch.net. Accessed 27th May 2008.

4 World Association of Medical Editors Listserve discussion – Rewarding Peer Reviewers: payment vs. other types of recognition. www.wame.org. Accessed 27th May, 2008.

5 Miller L. Response to Ask the Nature Editor topic on Peer Reviewers. http://network.nature.com/forums/askthenatureeditor/549. Accessed 27th May 2008.

6 Hauser M, Fehr E (2007) An Incentive Solution to the Peer Review Problem. PLoS Biol 5(4): e107 doi:10.1371/journal.pbio.0050107

Reviewer Instructions

All journals provide some level of instructions for reviewers. The information those instructions contain is highly variable. Many focus solely on the process of returning a review to the editorial office. Others might point out the ethical responsibilities of reviewers, issues of confidentiality, appropriate language for critiquing an article, and the need to provide specific examples in support of any general statements on the worthiness of an article. Most titles will also define the various recommendations for publication, such as what constitutes a minor revision or what should prompt a rejection.

If journals provide guidance on how to conduct a review or instructions on what reviewers should consider in their evaluations, which points appear repeatedly in various journals' instructions? As far as I can tell, the list is long and varied, and clearly this diversity reflects the subject matter. Apart from issues of accuracy, originality, and detection of ethical violations (such as plagiarism), there really is little that unifies journals as disparate as, for example, medieval history and computer science. Consequently, producing a definitive list is impossible, though Table 1 attempts to summarize just a few of the most common components of instructions for reviewers.

Liz Wager and colleagues, in effect, reduced the entire process further to three essential questions in the title of her publication *"How to Survive Peer Review": Do I Understand It? Do I Believe It? Do I Care?* [7] (I heartily recommend you take a look at this publication at: http://resources.bmj.com/bmj/pdfs/wager.pdf).

The location of reviewer instructions is also an important point to consider. Some journals have their own specific online home page where the instructions can be found. Other locations include: in the reviewer center of an online peer review system; accompanying

Table 1. Typical leading questions from instructions for reviewers

- Is the manuscript clinically accurate?
- Is the manuscript directed appropriately to the readership?
- Is the purpose/intent of the article explained adequately? Do the authors stick to stated objectives?
- Are the authors' arguments/thesis/data/experimental approach original?
- Does the article describe adequately the research methodology employed? Is enough information presented to enable readers to replicate the results?
- Assess the depth of the reference listings: are they comprehensive and current?
- Is the appropriate statistical technique employed? Was this application conducted correctly?
- Are tables and figures well designed? Is the information presented in tabular form redundant?
- Is the manuscript of appropriate length?
- Is the conclusion supported by information presented in the article?
- Is there any evidence of ethical impropriety?

7 Wager E. How to Survive Peer Review. BMJ Books; London. 2002. p15.

the manuscript/invitation to review letter; or attached to a "Reviewer Accepted" template letter (dispatched when an individual accepts an invitation to review).

Structured Review Forms

Working, pessimistically, on the assumption that many will simply skip over the instructions, a more direct approach to getting reviewers to improving the quality of reviews is to provide highly-structured review forms. Such a form may include many of the questions raised in Table 1. The added bonus of a structured review form, it is assumed, is this can lead to some uniformity in the reviews received, which in turn may simplify the reviewer rating process.

At *Headache*, we concluded we were publishing a lot of good data and some highly original thinking, but this was sometimes obscured by poor methodology, inappropriate use of statistical techniques (or worse, the incorrect application of the technique), and weak presentations of results. Consequently we developed a more structured review questionnaire, forcing reviewers to consider these issues. Recognizing many of our reviewers had only a rudimentary knowledge of statistics, we appointed a statistical consultant and gave reviewers the option to suggest we refer a manuscript to the consultant. We felt the referral approach helped those reviewers who were statistically challenged and who might either have reviewed this aspect of the manuscript tentatively, or worse, ignored it altogether. We also probably eradicated several instances where those who were statistically challenged and somewhat deluded about the strength of their skills might consequently make erroneous suggestions. Fully 40% of the research submissions *Headache* received in the last 2 years have been referred to the statistical consultant. We have yet to quantify the impact of the consultant, but several authors have expressed satisfaction their papers were greatly improved as a result of this focused review effort.

The *take-home* message from this anecdote is if you are considering developing more structured reviews engage the editorial board to get a broad account of the deficiencies in the content you publish. Develop questions to address those deficiencies head on. If you use an online peer review management system, these types of questions can always be added as customizable features.

Studies do suggest great variance between journals regarding the structure of review forms/questionnaires, or "issues to consider", as outlined in their instructions to reviewers. A 1996 study by Erica Frank of the top 100 journals (as rated by the 1989 Institute for Scientific Information citation frequency index) established that only 51% of these titles specifically requested reviewers consider if the authors had overstated their conclusions.[8] A larger proportion, though still a surprisingly low number at 72%, asked reviewers explicitly to consider the novelty or originality of the article. As no standard template exists, this again suggests it might be a beneficial exercise to canvas those at your journal who make a decision/recommendation regarding publication to establish what they most want to see in reviews returned.

If you want to take a look at what some journals do to guide their reviewers, follow the links in Table 2.

Reviewer Education Measures

Restructuring review templates or providing reviewer instructions might generate immediate gains, but a more long-term

8 Frank E. Editors' Requests of Peer Reviewers: A Study and a Proposal. *Preventive Medicine*. 1996. 25:2; 102-104.

Table 2. Reviewer Guidelines

The *American Journal of Pathology*: http://ajp.amjpathol.org/misc/forReviewers.shtml
ACS Chemical Biology: http://pubs.acs.org/journals/acbcct/publishing/reviewer.html
Journal of Online Mathematics and its Applications: http://mathdl.maa.org/mathDL/4/?nodeId=377&pa=content&sa=viewDocument
Journal of Monetary Economics: http://people.bu.edu/rking/JME_files/guide_for_referees.htm
Journal of Business Administration Online: http://jbao.atu.edu/review.htm
Nature: http://blogs.nature.com/peer-to-peer/

The Journal of Rheumatology provides guidelines for new reviewers: http://jrheum.com/newreviewers.html

The Annals of Rheumatic Diseases reviewer instructions also include information about a downloadable certificate available in the Reviewer Centers (on the BenchPress system employed): http://ard.bmj.com/ifora/review_with_bp.dtl

Royal Society for Chemistry:
www.rsc.org/Publishing/ReSourCe/RefereeGuidelines/RefereeingProcedureAndPolicy/index.asp

approach could involve reviewer education.

Upfront I should state evidence suggests a didactic approach is not terribly successful. Davidoff, in an article in the *BMJ* in 2004, reaffirmed "learning by doing" actually led to better quality reviewers.[9] In the same issue of the *BMJ,* a study by Schroter et al. concluded attendance at a lecture-based (i.e., didactically-oriented) training workshop made a statistically negligible difference in the quality of reviews.[10] They did establish that the group of reviewers who had attended a training session were more likely to reject a paper; while the quality of the review may have stayed the same, the outcome regarding publication was different.

Davidoff suggests a more experiential approach to encouraging better reviews – learn by doing more and receiving feedback.[9] He contends, probably quite correctly, editors often make the best reviewers simply because they are constantly evaluating manuscripts and, therefore, get to see good reviews and can learn from the most effective evaluations. Unfortunately editors don't have time to critique reviews in detail (they're too busy critiquing articles). Furthermore, evidence suggests that such simple written feedback served as an ineffective educational tool. [10]

A possible amalgamation of these approaches could involve setting up a forum at an annual society meeting, if such an appropriate meeting exists, where a sample article is presented and, after a short discussion on the essential elements of review (even experiential learning methods require some grounding in theory and established methods), attendees could critique an article briefly and then *compare* their efforts to those provided by experienced reviewers (such as members of an editorial board).

If resources permitted, this method could be administered in an online environment. A

9 Davidoff F. Improving peer review: who's responsible?: Peer review needs recognition at every stage of scientific life. *BMJ.* 2004 328(7441): 657–658.

continued

more dynamic learning experience is created by the comparative exercise rather than the lecture-based approach analyzed by Schroter and colleagues.[10]

I am going to attempt an experiential learning experience on the priorities and pitfalls of peer review in a session this summer at the American Headache Society annual meeting – I'll report back on its success (or failure!). Of course the cynics will say, "But if there is no incentive to provide better reviews, why would anyone choose to attend?" To which I shall respond flippantly, "Never underestimate the power of free food to draw a crowd."

More seriously, and in conclusion, it does appear improving the quality of reviews received is probably a multi-faceted effort. Ultimately journals need to ensure manuscripts are sent to trusted reviewers who will not let you down (with the knock on effect of possibly diminishing the reputation of your journal); that these reviewers know what is required of them, and they are given the advice they need to complete a review effectively. You may be able to guide reviewers subtly by providing some guidelines or more directly by actively structuring their review responses.

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Kate Wilson, Editorial Officer for Rheumatology, *for some suggestions on journal review guidelines and the contributors to the ISMTE discussion forum "Rewarding Reviewers" debate for noting some of the incentives their journals employ.*

10 Schroter S, Black N, Evans S, Carpenter J, Godlee F, Smith R. Effects of training on quality of peer review: randomised controlled trial. *BMJ*. 2004 328(7441):673-675.

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Job Bank The job bank will post available positions for members looking for new positions, those interested in taking on additional work and those looking for temporary work whether it be in-house or work from home. Members will be able to post their CV and indicate the type of position they are looking for. Publishers will be able to post available positions for all members to look through and access posted CVs for potential candidates. This will be an extremely valuable resource, and we look forward to launching it shortly.

A Story from Up North

by Sirkka-Liisa Leinonen

This is a story from up north, Finland. I am Sirkka-Liisa Leinonen, managing editor of *European Journal of Neurology,* which is a Wiley-Blackwell title. I have been working for the journal for four years, part-time at first, full-time since January 2008.

In my old life, I was a partner in a small translation agency. I translated qualitative research into English and revised the English of research papers and dissertations written by Finnish authors. I was often consulted about the cryptic comments of reviewers, and I shared moments of joy and frustration at decision letters with my clients. So, in a way, I feel I have gotten a promotion now that I send decision letters myself – possibly to someone I used to work for. Deep down, I still feel a special sympathy toward authors in their efforts to gain public recognition for their work.

When Professor Matti Hillbom, one of my clients, was appointed editor-in-chief for *European Journal of Neurology,* he came to our office to ask if one of us would be willing to work as a part-time managing editor. I loved my work, but it was becoming more and more hectic with an increasing workload and increasingly tight schedules. I had no way to influence my clients' deadlines, and if you have ever tried, you know it is impossible to get rid of happy customers in an elegant way. (I tried a couple of times, but it was too heart-rending, and in the end I always gave in and accepted the work.) Therefore I seized the opportunity to try something different. The part-time job I was offered sounded interesting and more relaxed. We were to process about 200 papers a year, and the Paris office would process another 200 papers and take care of the problems.

Sure enough, it was relaxed at first and I was able to learn the basic skills of my new trade by trial and error and by asking a lot of questions. But about a year later, the Paris office closed down and I found myself in sole charge of the editorial office, preparing for migration to version 3 of Manuscript Central and recruiting new staff. What I had looked forward to as a soft landing to part-time retirement actually turned out to be the start of a new career! Our editorial team now consists of two editors-in-chief, eight associate editors, a managing editor and an assistant managing editor. Last year we processed 1002 submissions.

Our electronic editorial office spans a number of time zones. I work from the corner room of our home in a quiet suburb of Oulu, a small university town on the western coast of Finland, 140 miles south of the Arctic Circle. When I switch on my computer in the morning, I often have a message waiting from our Singapore editor, who has a head start of hours compared to the rest of us. By the time I have cleared my inbox, our European editors have come to work in Finland, Britain, Austria, Italy, and Turkey. And by the time I close shop for the day, I may hear from our American editor in Florida. Our editors-in-chief are in Oulu and London; my Wiley-Blackwell contacts are in Oxford and Edinburgh, UK; ScholarOne Support is based in Virginia, USA; and the European Federation of Neurological Societies, which is our background organization, is headquartered in Vienna, Austria. We have an editorial board of 20 members from all over the world. And we get submissions from all continents. It is no exaggeration to say we all work in a truly global context.

It is amazing such a complex network can operate with such a degree of fluency. I have met some of the people I work with, but not all. Still, I consider all of them workmates – and excellent ones at that. I enjoy my e-mail chats with the highly experienced and insightful members of the editorial team. I can bombard my editorial services manager at Wiley-Blackwell with the weirdest questions, and he will patiently answer. I have relied on all of my helpful and expert production editors for seamless co-operation in both routine work and mystery solving.

We use a modified workflow in Manuscript Central. I check and assign submissions and make preliminary reviewer suggestions. The associate editors select and assign the reviewers and, when the reviews have been returned, they make the recommendations. I commit the recommendations for reject and major/minor revision. Acceptances need to be confirmed by the editors-in-chief. I then export the accepted papers to our production editor in Edinburgh. It sounds simple. But it isn't always.

I remember my first lonely weeks as the only managing editor. I worked literally day and night for a couple of weeks, orchestrating the migration. During the day I tested new procedures and spotted problems. When people came to work in Virginia at 4 pm Finnish time, I started a second shift. Guided by the e-mailed instructions from my migration consultant, I spent the evening trying to get things straight, edit e-mail templates, and learn my way around our Manuscript Central site. That was something I would call a hands-on learning experience.

At about the same time, we experienced two major problems. First, ScholarOne decided to encrypt users' passwords and there was a flood of frustrated user feedback. Second, we became aware of negative impacts of the Journal's growth: a considerable backlog of accepted papers had accumulated over the years, our times from acceptance to publication were very long, and our authors were unhappy. I must confess that, struggling with all those issues, I occasionally did dream of retirement.

But things began to improve. We worked hard for a year to clear the backlog. We hired another editor-in-chief. We appointed eight associate editors. We streamlined our editorial board to half of the original size. We began to get better submissions. We began to grow. It is hard to say how it all happened, and I am sure many things contributed. The editors-in-chief met to discuss strategy. The new associate editors brought in a lot of expertise. I attended Manuscript Central University and became more confident with my job. It was a pleasure to sense the atmosphere of growth and development.

I feel fairly comfortable with the technical routines of my work now, and I have learnt to navigate in the international networks. I think my old job and background as a self-employed entrepreneur have been useful. I was used to taking care of the quality of work, scheduling, self-education, customer relations, the whole lot. Managing editors need all those skills. They need to know a little about many things, to have the courage to act with even meagre knowledge, and to have an open mind toward learning new things. Surprising things may happen on any day.

I very much appreciated the opportunity to join ISMTE. I was told about it by Michael Willis, my editorial services manager in Oxford, before it had even been officially publicized. I guess I was among the first people to register as a member. I don't know where, physically speaking, my closest colleagues are, but I know now my virtual colleagues are only a mouse click away.

Calendar of Events

Editorial Manager User Group Meeting
June 12-13, 2008
Hyatt Regency Cambridge
Boston, Massachusetts, USA
website:
www.editorialmanager.com

EQUATOR Network Official Launch Meeting and Lecture
June 26, 2008
The Royal Society of Medicine
London, United Kingdom
website: http://www.equator-network.org/index.aspx?o=1113

Association of American University Presses Annual Meeting June 26-29, 2008
Montreal, Canada, website:
http://aaupnet.org/programs/annualmeeting/index.html

International Academy of Nursing Editors
27th Annual Meeting
August 4-6, 2008
Abano, Italy. website:
www.nursingeditors.org

ISMTE Board of Directors Meeting
August 26-28, 2008
Peabody Hotel
Baltimore, MD, USA

Mediterranean Editors & Translators Meeting
September 11-13, 2008
University of Split, School of Medicine, Split, Croatia
website:
www.metmeetings.org/?section=metm08_call

ALPSP International Conference
10-12 September 2008
Old Windsor, UK, website:
http://www.alpsp.org/ngen_public/article.asp?aid=2008

6th International Congress on Peer Review & Biomedical Publication
September 10-12, 2009
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, website: www.ama-assn.org/public/peer/peerhome.htm

Please send your suggestions for inclusion in the calendar to kristen.overstreet@mac.com.

Call for Articles

Please submit articles and ideas for articles to the *Newsletter* Editor, Kristen Overstreet, at kristen.overstreet@mac.com.

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Thank you!

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