

Odds and Ends From Your ISMTE Vice President

From the Vice President - Taylor Bowen

2009 Conferences

If there is one thing you do for your professional development this year, make sure it is attending an ISMTE Conference. Put the date(s) on your calendar and get your budget approved now.

Second Annual ISMTE Conferences

The Professional Editorial Office 2009

• **Baltimore, Maryland • August 4-5:**
"Managing Your Journal—In Print and Online" (*note that this meeting will now run 1½ days*)

• **Oxford, England • August 25:**
"Managing Ethical Issues & Ensuring Best Practices in Peer Review"

We have stimulating speakers lined up, hands-on breakout sessions scheduled, and plenty of time for you

to network with your colleagues. You will get a lot out of an ISMTE meeting!

Visit the ISMTE website for the complete agendas of the conferences (<http://ismte.org/conferences2009.html>). Register soon to ensure a spot!

More Thoughts on the 10th Anniversary of Online Peer Review

Though I suspect the actual release date of any of our leading Web-based peer-review systems is hard to pin down, my memory tells me that it was about 1999 when these revolutionary systems started appearing and were beginning to be used.

At the time, I was with Carden Jennings Publishing Co., a small (20 employees?) firm in Charlottesville, Virginia, that developed a little software program for the sole purpose of keeping track of

In this issue:

Articles

- *Editors Do It With Style* **4**

Columns

- *President's Message* **1**
- *Tips & Tricks* **6**
- *Ethical Questions to Ponder* **13**
- *Portrait of an Editorial Office* **16**

Calendar **17**

manuscripts and artwork flowing through our own shop. Interestingly, some of our medical publishing clients got wind of our tracking expertise and asked if they could purchase our software—so we quickly packaged ‘Manuscript Manager’ (later to morph into Manuscript Central™) and eagerly installed it in about 12 editorial offices.

Lo and behold, along came the Internet about the same time, and programmers started playing with the submission of meeting abstracts online, and even—*gulp*—manuscript files and figures. The Carden Jennings staff got busy drawing up workflows on the white board and figuring out how the whole process of peer review could take place online. Our medical publishing clients were consulted about their processes. Editors were asked what they would like to have in a Web-based review process. I even drew up the first client’s Manuscript Central workflow ‘story boards’—in Quark Xpress, if you can believe it, with boxes, arrows, and facsimiles of what each screen might look like if you performed certain tasks. A programmer I was not, but somehow our ragtag team (if I do say so myself) got that first site to work—and suddenly a new business model (application services) was born for our small company and many others.

Other software companies were developing their own software at the same time, of course, and homegrown systems (read: e-mail, which also blossomed 10 years ago) were popping up everywhere.

Consider again how our industry has changed since 1999. The bumps and bruises of

those early days—and there were plenty—are gone, the early adopters of online review systems took their licks and helped hone the systems into what they are today, and you are in the minority if you do not use electronic processes for your editorial workflow.

Ten years ago we were working in central editorial offices or publishing houses feverishly standing over copy machines and running to the FedEx box down the street in time for pickup. We were content with 24-hour processing. Today, we have a much more distributed staffing model and cannot possibly tolerate even the slightest delay for something to happen online. I have to laugh when I find myself cursing at my computer and tapping my mouse in aggravation when an online task is taking a few extra seconds but which used to take days.

Perhaps ISMTE should gather your recollections of the pre- and post-Internet editorial office world and be an unofficial historian of editorial practices. Send me your anecdotes and horror stories and I will see about publishing a few of the best stories in future issues of *EON*.

iPhone

Speaking of the rapid changes we have experienced in editorial practices over the last ten years, who would have thought that today I can do nearly all of my peer-review management work on a mobile phone device? Not that I do this, of course. An iPhone is wonderful, but the screen is small. It boggles my mind, though, when I realize that I have a

device in my pocket that will work nearly anywhere and gives me full access to e-mail and the Internet.

A Tip/Trick: Enhancing the Audit Trail/History

One of the nicest features of Manuscript Central™ and Editorial Manager™ (and I assume other systems) is the Audit Trail and History feature, respectively, where e-mails are filed and tasks are registered and date-stamped.

For one of my editors-in-chief (EIC), though, the Audit Trail does not meet his needs to quickly find information he requires across the system. So the EIC and I use what may be a unique e-mail system that we have found to be a more effective way for rapid searching compared to the time required to slog through Audit Trails: We share an email in-box and folder system—but in a way that is a bit out of the ordinary. Let me try to explain.

First, we are both Mac users (I will explain why this is important in a moment).

Second, the Editor created a journal e-mail account using his institution's email servers. Nothing unusual yet, I realize—we all have journal e-mail addresses. The difference is in how we use the shared in-box/account.

The EIC and I set up our respective Mac Mail application (NOT a Webmail interface using a browser, but rather the mail application we use for our everyday e-mails, called "Mail" on a Mac) to receive and send using the journal e-mail account. This was easily done with a few key pieces of

information (server names, server IDs, and passwords, etc.).

Next, we established a series of e-mail folders that the EIC and I both have access to (again, on our Mail application). It is important to point out that the EIC cannot see any of my *other* e-mail folders on my computer (personal, business, etc.) because they are associated only with my personal e-mail account; nor can I see any of the EIC's personal folders on his Mac.

Now the EIC and I both receive all journal e-mails in our Mac Mail application and in a separate journal in-box. I am responsible for screening all incoming e-mails, taking action when required, and then moving the e-mails to the appropriate folder according to the protocols we have established.

We get a lot of e-mail in this account, of course. Indeed, we set up nearly all of the journal's Manuscript Central™ e-mails to be cc'd to our shared e-mail in-box. We keep our in-box clean by saving and filing our emails as previously described.

The beauty of following this process in Mac Mail is that the application's search function is powerful and fast. The EIC is often keen, for example, to be able to quickly find all correspondence on a specific manuscript or all messages on a certain topic. Rather than plowing through the Manuscript Central™ Audit Trails, he can enter a search term within Mac Mail and get an exhaustive result much more quickly. And on the Mac, you can search not only the 'to,' 'from,' and 'subject' fields and across folders you specify, but you can also search through entire messages.

Continued on page 15

Editors Do It With Style

by **Deborah Bowman**

Managing Editor, ASGE

dbowman@asge.org

My favorite *Peanuts* cartoon shows Peppermint Patty and Marcie sitting at their desks in the classroom. Patty says, 'I wonder if they have fractions in heaven.'

Marcie answers, 'No fractions, Sir...no decimals, either.'

Patty still looks worried. 'How about commas?'

'There have to be commas, Sir,' Marcie says. 'We can't avoid them.'

With a sigh, Patty concludes, 'Eternity's going to be longer than I thought.'

Grammar, punctuation, word usage...the very words send shudders down many spines. I took a copyediting class as I worked on my MFA degree, and the night before the first exam, I had a dream about the test. When I looked at the page before me in the dream, I realized that all the questions were about the Peloponnesian War. In a panic, I asked the professor why a copyediting test was full of questions about the

Peloponnesian War. She replied, 'A good copyeditor has to know a little about everything.' Sometimes I am wiser in my sleep than I am when I'm awake.

Part of the problem with copyediting is that so many style guides exist, each one a little (or a lot) different from the others. When I started working at Mosby Publishing, we did our own copyediting, and I was taught with the *AMA Manual of Style*, but you can also choose from APA, ACS, MLA, AP, Chicago, Gregg (less well known, but it has a spectacular index, making it very user friendly), and dozens more. Usually, when you become an editor, your predecessors have already adopted a style guide; if not, you need to choose one that makes sense for your type of journal. But that's only the beginning. You should also create a journal-specific style guide. Maybe you inherited this, as well, when you got the job. But your journal's own

guide should never be static, and if you haven't looked at your style guide in some time, you probably should revisit, revise, and update it.

You can begin this with a list of abbreviations. Most specialties have abbreviations or acronyms that are commonly known. For example, GI means gastrointestinal; all gastroenterologists know this, but AMA doesn't list it as an abbreviation that can be used without first spelling it out. My style guide for *Gastrointestinal Endoscopy* lists gastrointestinal as a word that should always be abbreviated. We have a list of 13 abbreviations we can use without explanation. Create your own list with the experts in the field to make sure you are choosing words or phrases that they should all know. Update this occasionally because every field gets new terms as it evolves.

Many other details should be in your style guide. Is the language of your journal formal

Editors Do It With Style

continued

or informal? Are some articles (e.g., original studies) formal, whereas others (editorials, perhaps) informal? Is jargon to be avoided? Do your abbreviations use periods? How should citations be presented within the text? Should Latin words be italicized? What do you think of serial commas? I know that I could never work for a newspaper because AP style says to omit the final comma in a series, and I can't bring myself to do that. Why use a style that invites confusion? Picture the article that quotes an award winner who wants to acknowledge three people in his acceptance speech. It might read, 'I would like to thank my parents, Elvis and Mother Theresa.' What a scandal!

Don't be afraid to inject your own preferences. Many issues are cut and dried; the difference between 'its' and 'it's' are absolute and finite. But does it bother you if an author uses 'employ' to mean 'use'? How particular are you about the rules for hyphens? In a list, do you react like hearing fingernails on a blackboard if the author writes 'firstly' and 'lastly'? In an animal study, if the authors say that 'the animals were sacrificed,' do you picture an altar and chanting pagans? Then ban the phrase from your journal; you have the

power.

Even with spelling, some questions can arise. If yours is an American journal but the article is written by a European team, do you allow 'labour,' 'colour,' 'anaesthesia,' or do you change them to American spellings? If a dictionary gives an alternate second spelling (labeled versus labelled, for example), do you follow the authors' lead, or do you use the preferred spelling? You might want to have a rule in your guide that covers that.

Periods and commas always go inside the end quote. Well, they do in America. The rule is different in Europe. Do you see why so many problems arise? A book like *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* by Englishwoman Lynne Truss is adorable and great fun to read, but some of the rules it puts forth do not apply in America. How about *Lapsing Into a Comma* and *The Elephants of Style*, both by Bill Walsh? They are interesting and informative books, but he injects many of his own preferences into them. *Edit Yourself* by Bruce Ross-Larson is helpful in its emphasis on simplifying language to make it more concise. A quick search on Amazon for 'grammar book' brought up 48 different choices. So many stylebooks exist because so many opinions abound, and that's not a bad

thing.

Don't plan to create your style guide quickly; it might take several months of combing your journal's articles before you feel confident that you've covered the bases. Once you think it is complete, you will want to send the file to each of your copyeditors. But keep it handy for yourself as well; you will constantly be changing it as new situations arise. You should also read through the guide occasionally to remind yourself of your own rules, and update it often. Many or most of us proofread everything that goes into our journals; even after the copyeditor has had her chance, I almost always find several corrections I need to make in every article. The guide I have created for my journal is 27 single-spaced pages long; yours may be longer or shorter, but you will certainly add to it as new submissions arrive with new and astonishing variations of the English language.

We purists wince with pain when we hear or read poor grammar, but one could argue that we shouldn't be so rigid; language evolves by changes in common usage. Such changes in language explain why Shakespeare is a challenge for most people to read today; people spoke much differently

Continued on page 15

New Approaches to Peer Review

by Jason Roberts

*Managing Editor, Headache
Managing Editor, Journal of Sexual Medicine
journal@ahsnet.org*

Peer review is probably receiving greater scrutiny now than at any other point in its long history.[1] Such introspection from within the academic and scientific community is being generated in response to apparent weaknesses in the current system. Such weaknesses include: it is inherently conservative, slow, open to superficial evaluation, and restricted to a pre-selected group of *experts*. Richard Smith, former editor of the *BMJ*, added to the list of complaints that peer review is 'highly subjective, prone to bias, easily abused, poor at detecting gross defects.'^[2]

A second strand of debate on current approaches to peer review is simply a reaction to new ways of communicating, interacting, and participating on the Web: the Web 2.0 notion. This debate is leading to calls for new models for evaluating content for publication.

This article is not intended to provide a detailed review of the peer-review process, its failings and attempts to improve, or alter approaches to the assessment of a manuscript. Instead, its intention is to simply raise awareness of new ideas some journals are embracing.

Emerging Debates on Peer Review

The evaluation and decision-making process has traditionally been shrouded in

secrecy. Authors typically are not made aware of the identity of reviewers (and in a double-blinded model, the reviewers are not made aware of the identity of the authors) and readers are never privy to the processes (or machinations!) of the editorial decision-making process. This presents some concern over the opportunities for hidden biases to influence the decision-making process as well as inevitable questions over the quality of the review process if comments, and those who made them, remain masked.

Simultaneously to the debate on quality, emerging new patterns in how we interact with content online are forcing some journals to consider introducing new models of review. For example, think how many news stories you read online that allow you, the reader, to post a comment afterwards. Applying those principles has been a driving force behind the open peer-review movement, with an emphasis on collective collaboration in the genesis of an article that is eventually deemed publishable.

Open peer review is an umbrella term used to describe approaches to peer review that emphasize removing the shroud of secrecy or encouraging wider participation. There are, however, several varieties of open review (open peer review, author solicited reviews, community peer review, private open peer review followed

1 Gura T. Scientific publishing: peer review, unmasked. *Nature*. 2002. 416:258-260

2 Smith R. Opening up *BMJ* peer review. *BMJ*. 1999. 318:4-5

by community review, private open peer review followed by open postpublication assessment, no peer review with prepublication comments), all of which I shall examine.

Both strands of the debate on peer review (improving quality and updating approaches to mirror new online models of networking and participation) have lead to a call for greater transparency in the review process. It is important to stress that these debates are not exclusive. Notions of no peer review followed by postpublication commentary may be a long way from being adopted by journals in certain fields — a leap too far perhaps. But simple efforts at open peer review such as the identification of the reviewers and/or their comments alongside the published article represent a new approach within traditional models of peer review. These models may force participants in the review process to ‘raise their game.’

Improving Traditional Models of Peer Review

Sharing reviews with fellow reviewers

A movement towards increasing transparency within traditional peer-review processes has been slowly emerging for some time. Most commonly this has been through the increasing numbers of journals that now share all evaluations with the reviewers of a particular manuscript, allowing a reviewer to see a fellow evaluators’ impression of a manuscript. The reasons for doing this are varied. Reviewers for select journals may have expressed interest in reading other evaluations. Editors may believe that this represents a first

step to greater reviewer accountability: suppliers of a poor quality review may be embarrassed by their contribution in comparison with other reviews or a novice may learn what is really expected by comparing other reviews to their own.

Open Peer Review with Traditional Frameworks

While retaining elements of traditional peer review, namely selection of expert reviewers and the completion of evaluations ahead of publication, some journals have begun to experiment with some levels of transparency either by publishing the names of the reviewers with an article or even presenting the reviewers’ comments with the online version of a manuscript. Presumably there are two motivations for attempting this approach. The first clearly is an attempt to force greater responsibility from reviewers to provide a thorough, high-quality review. Superficial reviews may be avoided if other parties beyond the editorial team, be it the author(s) or readers, can see who contributed the evaluations. Secondly, either identifying the reviewer or providing public access to the reviewers’ comments sheds some light on the decision-making process. One consequence of this may be that reviewers’ conflicts of interest could potentially be revealed (despite efforts by journals to request reviewers excuse themselves if a conflict, perceived or otherwise, exists).

The Publishing Research Consortium suggested that many journals believe such openness may meet with reluctance from reviewers to criticize the work of subject thought-leaders, presumably amongst those

mindful of damage to potential career advancement.[3] The Council of Science Editors suggested that knowledge of reviewers' names could lead to 'animosity or vengeful behavior,' which may affect the quality of reviews.[4] Consequently, fear of such behavior could lead to an outcome opposite to what was intended: somewhat insipid reviews that do not challenge the authors.

The *Biomedical Central – Series* journals have fully embraced openness within the traditional models for peer review. The editors of these journals still select reviewers to provide evaluations. The reviewers are obligated, however, to sign their reviews. The reviews and the identity of the reviewers are then provided with the published article as supplemental data. This prepublication history presents all the reviewers' comments and the authors' responses. The following link not only takes you to an explanation of the process in full but also provides an example of how the data is presented alongside the published article: <http://www.biomedcentral.com/info/authors/bmcseries>.

EMBO Journal, starting in January 2009, is undertaking a variant of this process. They are offering *authors* the opportunity to have their manuscripts published with files containing all communication regarding their manuscripts including the review comments (with the exception of confidential comments to the editor). Though the reviews will be made publicly available, the identity of the reviewers

will remain obscured, an alternative to the BMC-series journals model, which does identify the reviewers. This obscuring of the identity of reviewers is in line with a contemplative paper published by Carmi and Koch in *Learned Publishing* that suggested publishing the reviews without identifying who contributed them would remove concerns over 'fall-out' and retribution.[5] Pernille Rørth, Executive Editor of *EMBO Journal*, described the rationale for this approach: 'A transparent editorial process will help demystify editorial decisions and should encourage constructive referee and author argumentation.'[6]

The *British Medical Journal* allowed for some similar opening up of its peer-review process with the requirement that reviewers identify themselves at the beginning of their reviews. This information is then made available to the authors after completion of the initial peer review, though authors are warned not to contact reviewers while the manuscript is still under consideration for publication. The identity of reviewers is also made available to other reviewers upon the posting of a decision, a subtle extension beyond what many journals do under traditional models, which is offer review comments to the other reviewers, anonymously, post-decision. Critically, for now, the *BMJ* does not share this information with the public.

Evidence on whether these efforts have affected the ability of journals pursuing open review models to recruit reviewers is mixed.

3 Publishing Research Consortium. Peer review in scholarly journals: Perspective of the scholarly community – an international study. 2008. p 5

4 Scott-Lichter D, and the Editorial Policy Committee, Council of Science Editors. CSE's White Paper on Promoting Integrity in Scientific Journal Publications. Reston, Va: CSE; 2006

5 Carmi R, Kich C. Improving Peer Review with CARMA. *Learned Publishing* 20:3, 2007. 173-176

6 Rørth P. The EMBO Journal 2009: new initiatives. *The EMBO Journal* (2009) 28, 1–3

Back in 1999 van Rooyen suggested that the likelihood of reviewers declining to review was greater in a trial of open peer review.^[7] Several years on, with the growth of open-access journals, it is possible that the likelihood of a declined invitation to review has diminished. It might also be suggested that shifts in attitudes to open peer review are happening constantly. Evidently more work is needed to quantify reviewer behavior. Furthermore, another issue for additional study, clearly required, is to determine if open-review models can work in smaller fields (i.e., with specialty or sub-specialty subject divisions) where the opportunities for reviewing a familiar peer, a friend, or thought-leaders' work are significantly greater than for general journals.

Alternative models to peer review

Author-solicited reviews

Though still relying on the evaluations of a pre-selected group of recognized experts, the open access journal *Biology Direct*, a BioMed Central journal, offers a novel twist on traditional models. The journal places the responsibility for the selection of reviewers in the hands of the authors rather than the editors. Authors are required to select three reviewers from a panel of experts the journal provides and obtain reviews from these individuals. Authors, obviously, then must incorporate the recommendations of the reviewers before the manuscript is accepted for publication. The identity of the reviewers is revealed to the authors upon publication of the

manuscript and the comments appear as part of the published article. Interestingly, if the author cannot secure the support of three reviewers, then effectively the manuscript is 'rejected,' as it cannot be submitted officially. Clearly this is the equivalent to screening ahead of peer review, a practice many journals undertake: if the review panel deems the manuscript is not worthy of consideration, the reviewers will simply not offer their services. If the author is able to secure three reviewers, the manuscript is published regardless of the outcome of the review comments. Presumably, the reviewers have been trained to only consent to provide reviews to papers that clearly possess publication potential.

This model does at least have a toe in the waters of traditional peer review in that the editor-in-chief is responsible for the assembly of subject-specific panels of reviewers. Additionally, with the panel of reviewers listed, authors and readers can determine for themselves if the best-qualified peers really have assessed a manuscript. The anonymity of traditional peer review, of course, does hide the fact that sometimes journals may have relied on individuals who were willing to provide a review but who may not have had the most appropriate level of expertise.

Community Peer Review

This model of review involves, to varying degrees, the incorporation of the views of peers in a public forum. Though there may be an element of screening out bad papers, once a manuscript clears that hurdle, it is placed in a

⁷ van Rooyen S, Godlee F, Evans S, Black N, Smith R. Effect of open peer review on quality of reviews and on reviewers' recommendations: A randomised trial. *BMJ*. 1999. 318:23-27

review environment where individuals can post evaluations of the manuscript for a period of time. When the evaluation period is over, the authors are required to incorporate these comments into the manuscript and only at that point can the manuscript be considered published.

The journal *Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics* employs such a model. Submissions are subject to screening and minor corrections (obvious errors, spelling and grammar) by a topical editor and then published in an online discussion forum called Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics Discussions (ACPD). Manuscripts are subjected to review, interactive debate (between the authors and commentators), and evaluation for eight weeks. As back up, should no one comment on a paper, traditional models of peer review are applied. When authors make the required revisions and resubmit, the topical editor will either subject the manuscript to further review or make a final judgment on publication. Papers that clearly have problems can be rejected after the public discussion.

In its most extreme form, community peer review might involve a completely open forum where any individual can comment on the manuscript without initial vetting from editorial staff. The author's job, following the completion of this process, is to synthesize these comments and incorporate them into the paper. This adds a somewhat collaborative element to the authorship of the paper. Under such a model it would be interesting to see if one commentator delivers a comment that is so prescient it acts, when incorporated by the

author, as the keystone to the entire paper. Does that commentator receive an author credit or an acknowledgement? A fascinating discussion on this new collaborative approach, its benefits and pitfalls, can be found in *Scientific American* in an online debate entitled 'Science 2.0: Great New Tool, or Great Risk?'. [8]

The most 'famous' attempt at a form of community-based review was *Nature's* open peer-review trial, undertaken in 2006. Authors submitting manuscripts to *Nature* were provided with an option to subject their manuscript to a parallel open review process. Authors that opted to try the experimental model had their paper placed in a public forum with the ability to comment open to anyone as long as they identified themselves. The comments were moderated for the removal of anything that could cause offense (bad language) or legal troubles. The journal did, however, insert itself into the commentary process by sending e-mails to groups of individuals they thought might be interested in commenting. Following the conclusion of the trial, *Nature* published an outcomes report.[9] It found take-up from authors was low, with just 5% willing to subject their work to such public scrutiny. In addition reader-reviewers did not exactly warm to the idea either, with 46% of the papers receiving no comment. Helpfully, the report also measured the quality of the comments for providing additional technical guidance for authors ('authors should address this', correcting errors) and editorial guidance (judging the contribution the paper makes to the published literature). The comments

8 Waldrop MM. Science 2.0: Great New Tool, or Great Risk? (article dated 9 January 2008). *Scientific American*

9 Editorial. Overview: Nature's peer review trial. *Nature* (2006) | doi:10.1038/nature05535

generally failed to be rated highly for either criterion. *Nature's* concluding remarks on the topic: 'Feedback suggests that there is a marked reluctance among researchers to offer open comments.'[9]

Private Open Peer Review followed by Community Review

Private open peer review sounds like a contradiction. It is, however, a model used by *The Journal of Interactive Media in Education*, since its launch in 1996 with an open peer review format: reviewers' names are made public; authors can challenge, respond, or adapt publicly; and other readers can influence outcomes by expressing concerns.

The process is fairly complex but is ultimately designed to ensure traditional elements of assessment by a panel of experts are retained before opening a manuscript still under review for public comment. Following submission and screening for quality, the editorial team assigns three reviewers. On a private site, the reviewers post their reviews and, in theory, engage in a discussion with the authors for a prescribed period of time. Following an assessment of the outcome of the debate on the merits of the paper, a manuscript may then be placed on a public discussion forum along with the debate that had ensued between the authors and peer reviewers. The public is then encouraged to add their comments on the article as well as extend the initial debate between authors and peer reviewers. When the manuscript is accepted for publication, the article and its review documentation are published.

Private Open Peer Review followed by Open Post-Publication Assessment.

A model that seems to blend elements of all the preceding examples is the approach to article acceptance and publication taken by *PLoS ONE*. Submitted manuscripts are directed initially to an in-house team to screen manuscripts on a variety of criteria, including ethical compliance and conflicts of interest. Professional editors employed by *PLoS ONE* also screen for quality to some extent. The manuscript is then sent to a member of a 750+-strong editorial board who in turn selects other members of the board to help provide a review of the manuscript. This process is recorded and published with the article. Critically, following publication, readers are able to critique the reviews, perhaps giving weight or credence to some comments over others. Following publication, readers are able to freely rate the article. Alongside the article runs an average reader rating based on three criteria: insight, reliability, and style. This rating approach ensures readers can offer assessment by grading what they have read.

No Peer Review with Pre-Publication Comments

Nature Precedings represents yet another take on the collaborative approach to the development and dissemination of ideas. It hosts preliminary finds and prepublication articles and invites community-based comments of a technical and editorial nature (no pun intended). The site does function in many ways as a preprint server, and it is assumed that authors will absorb the comments

regarding their data and/or contentions and work these into a paper ready for submission to a journal. *Nature Precedings* states that initial screening does take place for quality and appropriateness, but the criteria for grading quality is not stated. It is doubtful some fields will be able to embrace such approaches – as *Nature Precedings* itself notes, clinical medicine is not an area they can consider, presumably because of the potential for causing patient harm if a flawed practice is adopted from a paper that has yet to receive full peer review.

Adoption of open peer review

The degree to which certain fields are responding is perhaps dependent on the emphasis placed on certain objectives of peer review. Does peer review perform a gatekeeping role — allowing access to the ‘exclusive’ club that is the published scientific record, or does it provide a *correcting* function, ensuring articles are polished and accurate. These functions are not exclusive, but the weight applied to them may differ across fields. Certain fields in the biological sciences, for example, have embraced new forms of review quicker than clinical medicine.

Concluding remarks

The purpose of this article was to simply draw attention to other models of peer review. Perhaps in a few years all editorial offices will have different models to manage beyond the traditional invitation of reviewers and assignment of manuscripts to those who accept the invitations.

Personally, I do not foresee the abandonment of some form of assignment of experts by a journal any time soon. But I know that view is not shared by all. Peter Frishauf, the founder of Medscape, recently contended:

Peer review as we know it will disappear. Rather than the secretive prepublication review process followed by most publishers today, including Medscape, most peer review will occur transparently, and after publication. Within 5 years, most medical journals will be open access.[10]

Some models do seem to have potential to take the best of the old and new worlds, especially if attitudes change. I think the *Journal of Interactive Media in Education* model has potential to successfully embrace old and new approaches, but I would like to know more about the timelines to publication before embracing the concept wholeheartedly. I also wonder how difficult a task incorporating an extensive array of comments into a manuscript might be. Apart from sifting through reams of observations, corrections, and suggestions how should an author weigh the validity of these comments? If that task falls to editors, does that not reintroduce the editorial bias so many of these open peer-review models have been set up to combat?

Another concern remains that it is still unclear where the quality control is applied to the commentators in the public models. Might closed pools of commentators be the solution – which in a sense is like the *Biology Direct* model and the first part of the *PLoS One* approach, with their panel of experts.

Continued on page 18

10 Frishauf P. The end of peer review and traditional publishing as we know it. *Medscape J Med*. 2008. 10(11):267

COLUMN: *Ethical Questions To Ponder*

Welcome to the inauguration of the Ethical Questions to Ponder column. Many such issues, e.g., plagiarism, image manipulation, authorship, have been explored in articles that have appeared earlier in the pages of *EON*. However, these have been broad general discussions of ethical problems. This column will address the specific questions, which come across your desks on a regular basis. With this in mind, I would appreciate your suggestions related to the topics, questions, case reports, etc. you'd would like to see discussed in this column.

Ira Salkin,
Ethical Questions to Ponder Section Editor
irasalkin@aol.com



Can You Find Ghosts in Your Submitted Manuscripts?

by Ira Salkin
Ethical Questions to Ponder Section Editor
irasalkin@aol.com

I thought it only fitting that I should lead with a possibly common ethical question for you to ponder. Recently I received an extensive review article on a topic of some importance based on the authors' presentations at an international meeting. However, in initially reviewing the manuscript I was surprised to find the following at the end of the paper:

The initial draft of the manuscript was prepared by Dr. XX of XX Communications and funded by XX pharmaceuticals; however, all the authors provided their input to the subsequent drafts and completely approved the final text.

It seemed to me that the review article had actually been written by an individual working

for a public relations company hired by a drug company. Additionally, this individual was not, as might have been expected, included as one of the listed authors.

While all involved in the writing of the article had been transparent about this situation in acknowledging the participation of Dr. XX, it struck me that having a non-listed author initially draft the manuscript could still be perceived as unethical. Following the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) guideline on 'ghost authorship,' I contacted the corresponding author for an explanation of Dr. XX's involvement in the paper. He confirmed that the listed authors had provided the content of their presentations in written form to Dr. XX, who in turn compiled the separate pieces into a single paper. Dr. XX then forwarded the manuscript to the authors for final review and editing of their individual

Finding Ghosts

sections. I was informed that Dr. XX had not contributed any content to the paper, and that her role was restricted to assembling the four component units.

After consulting with colleagues who serve as editors or associate editors of a number of leading biomedical journals, the consensus was to allow the manuscript to be considered for publication. However, if the manuscript was accepted, the authors should be required to revise the acknowledgments section to clearly describe Dr. XX's role in the preparation of the paper.

In response to this situation, I immediately altered the contents of my journal's Instructions for Authors to include the statement 'Manuscripts drafted or written, in whole or part, by individuals other than those indicated as authors will NOT be considered for publication unless the contributions of such individuals are clearly and accurately presented in the acknowledgement section of the paper.'

While these actions satisfactorily addressed this specific incident, one is left to ponder the frequency of ghost writing in scholarly publications? Since those who participate as non-listed authors, for one reason or another, remain anonymous, it would be difficult to estimate how often they participate in the writing of manuscripts. However, since COPE has a separate section in its guidelines on 'What to do if you suspect ghost, guest, or gift authorship,' this practice may be more common than we suspect. Would it occur more frequently in those journals that are concerned with editorials, reviews, and research on economically significant issues such as evaluations of new pharmaceuticals or the management of infectious diseases? Does

non-listed authorship occur in papers published in 'soft' science journals? Will the present and future restrictions on outside funding, as well as pressures for professional advancement, lead to the expanded use of ghost writers to increase authors' citations?

Another related question to consider is the detection of contributions by non-listed authors. Dr. XX's participation in the paper noted above would never have been known if the authors had not acknowledged it. Unfortunately, while the COPE guideline discusses several approaches to managing situations in which ghost writing is suspected, it doesn't suggest methods for detecting its occurrence. Unlike plagiarism or image manipulation, there are no software programs to compare and contrast writing styles to establish the possible presence of unlisted authors.

Should editors or the editorial staff become suspicious if one or more of the authors of submissions appear as authors of an unusually high number of papers in a single year? Since authors love to cite their own work, a quick review of the reference section might provide valuable information. The authorship statement in my journal's Instructions, as in the vast majority of journals, states 'All authors have (a) made a substantial contribution to the concept and design, acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data, (b) participated in the drafting of the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content, and (c) have read and approved the final manuscript.' Can any individual meet these authorship criteria in upwards of 15 to 20 articles submitted to multiple journals in a single year?

Odds and Ends

continued

continued from page 3

Looking Ahead to 2009

There is a lot going on with ISMTE in 2009. From conferences to virtual discussions on hot topics, ISMTE is fully engaged in working to advance our profession and your career. We are still a young society, and we need and welcome input from our members. So get involved in ISMTE activities and leadership, take advantage of the resources the Society is making available to you, and help make this Society the leader in its field.

Taylor Bowen
ISMTE Vice President
Charlottesville, VA, USA
taylor@aegis-prm.com

Finding Ghosts

continued

Continued from page 14

Does the sudden improvement in the ability of authors to express themselves in English on revised manuscripts indicate the intervention of professional writers or non-listed authors? Does it warrant questioning corresponding authors as to the assistance they may have received in the preparation of the manuscripts? Even if such action seems justified, is it prudent to raise this issue with non-native English speaking authors?

Finally, should the ferreting out of non-listed authors be part of the job description of the editorial staff? In my estimation, all individuals who meet the criteria for authorship should be named as authors. If they provide more limited assistance, this should be included in the acknowledgments. Clear, specific, and firm statements on authorship and acknowledgments, such as those presented in this column or available for other sources, should be included in the Instructions for Authors. Furthermore, there should be penalties for not adhering to these authorship requirements. The main problem is getting authors to actually read your journal's instructions.

I look forward to receiving your suggestions of topics to include in future columns on Ethical Questions to Ponder. 🌐

ARTICLE

With Style

continued

Continued from page 5

in 1590. We have space within the confines of the English language for more than one set of rules; our task, as editors, is to choose the rules that make our journals the most understandable for our readers and to ensure that those rules are applied consistently from one article to the next and from one issue of the journal to the next. That is a challenging task, but it's one that is worthwhile and enjoyable for most of us who have chosen this profession.

I always enjoy debating matters of language, so please feel free to e-mail me with your questions or your own language pet peeves at dbowman@asge.org. 🌐

Thank You

BMJ, Informa/Taylor & Francis, OUP, and Wiley-Blackwell for your continued support of ISMTE.

Inside the American Cancer Society: An Assistant Managing Editor's Perspective

by Nicki Harris Salcedo

Assistant Managing Editor

Cancer and Cancer Cytopathology, *American Cancer Society*

nicki.salcedo@cancer.org

I was first introduced to the world of publishing shortly after I graduated from college. I accepted a job as the editorial assistant for the *Journal of Molecular Pharmacology*. Our office consisted of two people: the managing editor and me. We sat in a corner office of the pharmacology department of a medical school. The editor-in-chief and associated editors were all in-building. Much of the peer review was completed by hand and mail. I can't say much else, because it was a quiet, solitary job. That was exactly ten years ago.

Today, I am the assistant managing editor of the journals *Cancer* and *Cancer Cytopathology* at the American Cancer Society. The Society houses the editorial offices for three journals, including *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*. All of our editors work off-site, and now the peer review process is almost entirely paperless.

My primary responsibilities are with *Cancer Cytopathology*, published six times a year. This journal originally started out as a section of *Cancer*. Now, after 10 years of publication, it can stand on its own. All three of the journals of the American Cancer Society have different assets and strengths.

CA's submissions are based on mostly targeted and solicited content. The point of this journal is to reach general clinicians and nurses to support the mission of the Society. *CA* has the largest readership and holds the #1

Impact Factor for oncology journals. *Cancer* receives thousands of submissions each year and serves as a general oncology journal. *Cancer Cytopathology* is a specialty journal focusing on diagnosis. We have some of the best images of any of our competing journals.

While each journal is unique, the editorial office is one cohesive unit. Our group has a journals director, two managing editors, one assistant managing editor (that's me), three editorial assistants, one journals coordinator, one editorial coordinator, and a production assistant. Each person has discrete tasks, but at the same time we are all cross-trained to handle each other's duties when the need arises.

Our general responsibilities are to respond to queries from authors, reviewers, and editors; quality check manuscripts; facilitate peer review; and prepare manuscripts for publication. We also spend time refining and documenting procedures, making strategic plans for marketing and budgets, analyzing manuscript data, and presenting reports at various internal and external meetings.

We travel periodically for oncology conferences, publishing summits, or editorial board meetings. Suffice to say we are very busy! But we also are a team that enjoys our work and working together.

We also have the benefit of working in the larger corporate environment of the Society.

An Assistant Managing Editor's Perspective

continued

The American Cancer Society has over 600 employees in Atlanta and even more across the United States. The journals group is part of a larger department called Health Promotions, and we often collaborate with groups that publish books, web content, and patient information.

Our offices are located in downtown Atlanta near Centennial Olympic Park. We can see the Fountain of Rings, CNN Center, The Georgia Aquarium, and The Coca-Cola Museum. These

things are very important to Atlanta and also contribute to a great work environment. When the weather is nice we can walk to restaurants for lunch, see concerts in the park, and just be a part of the flow of the city.

I've been the assistant managing editor of *Cancer* and *Cancer Cytopathology* for almost four years, and I'm glad to say that it is both a job and career that I love. 🌐

Calendar of Events

ALPSP - The Journal Editorial Office

11 February 2009

Oxford, UK

www.alpsp.org

Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) - The Ethics of Editing

27 March 2009

London, UK

<http://publicationethics.org>

Council of Science Editors

1-5 May 2009

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

www.councilscienceeditors.org/events/annualmeeting09/index.cfm

ALPSP - Effective Journal Editorial Management

12 May 2009

London, UK

www.alpsp.org

ALPSP - Journal Development

24 June 2009

London, UK

www.alpsp.org

International Academy of Nursing Editors - 28th Annual Meeting

26-28 July 2009

Chicago, Illinois, USA

www.nursingeditors.org

ISMTE American Conference

August 4, 2009

Baltimore, MD, USA

www.ismte.org

ISMTE European Conference

August 25, 2009

Oxford, UK

www.ismte.org

6th International Congress on Peer Review & Biomedical Publication

10-12 September 2009

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

www.ama-assn.org/public/peer/peerhome.htm

European Association of Science Editors

10th EASE General Assembly and Conference

16-19 September 2009

Pisa, Italy

www.ease.org.uk/easeconfdocs/1stCircular-2009.pdf

ALPSP - Commissioning Book and Journal Content

25 November 2009

London, UK

www.alpsp.org

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

New Approaches to Peer Review

continued

Continued from page 12

The open review trial data from *Nature* showed significant unwillingness from reviewers to contribute to open evaluation. I wonder if authors too may be reluctant to have their work ripped apart and reassembled in public. Traditional peer review, and its confidentiality, also offers authors some *protection*, in that embarrassing errors, if caught, are hidden from the general readership. I imagine authors must also be worried about having their ideas stolen, regardless of whether their prepublication work has been date stamped.

Ultimately the transition to these new models will hinge on changes in behavior. As the move from print to online has demonstrated, change takes time. More to the point: exactly who amongst the journal readership is going to have the time to wade through copious prepublication notes and the extensive comments generated in a public forum? It strikes me that it is presently difficult enough to get busy scientists, academics, doctors, etc. to read just one article from beginning to end without adding the supplementary review data.



ISMTE *EON*

EON is the official newsletter of the International Society for Managing and Technical Editors (ISMTE) and is published monthly. The contents and opinions expressed by the authors do not necessarily represent those of the Society, the Board of Directors, or *EON* editors. Submissions are welcome and can be sent to the editor at the address below. Submissions may be edited for style and format without the author's permission. Authors must seek permission to reprint any copyrighted material and provide this permission to the editor. *EON*'s content belongs to the members of ISMTE. Users may view and download *EON* articles for personal, non-commercial use. Use beyond that allowed by the "Fair Use" limitations (sections 107 and 108) of the U.S. Copyright law require written permission from the *EON* editor.

Editor:

Kristen Overstreet

kristen.overstreet@mac.com

Associate Editors:

Susan Scalia

susan@awra.org

Emily Mueller

emueller@allenpress.com

Editorial Advisor:

Sirkka-Liisa Leinonen

sirkka-liisa.leinonen@pp.inet.fi

Section Editors:

Portraits: **Deborah Bowman**

dbowman@asge.org

Technology: **Kimberly Sankey**

sankey.kimberly@mayo.edu

Publication: **Jan McColm**

jmccolm@med.unc.edu

Ethics: **Ira Salkin**

irasalkin@aol.com

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 EON or online that variations in idiomatic usage and spelling should reflect the origins of the author. No one version of English is preferred over the other.

ISMTE Executive Office: PMB 300, 223 N. Guadalupe, Santa Fe, NM 87501 USA Tel: 1.505.983.4923 Admin@ISMTE.org