Training Fellows to Become Proficient Reviewers through Use of Journal Club: A Pilot Project

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Objectives
- Train Palliative Medicine fellows and Pharmacy residents to become proficient in the art of peer review
- Develop additional reviewers in the field of Palliative Medicine that have been trained according to our standards
- Enhance the participation of monthly Fellows’ Journal Club by reviewing blinded submitted/unpublished papers with real time interactive discussion

Background
The field of Palliative Medicine is relatively new, becoming a subspecialty in 2008, and the number of papers submitted to Journal of Palliative Medicine (JPM) has grown considerably in the last 10 years, requiring a larger pool of peer reviewers with expertise in the field. Biomedical journals rely on rigorous internal and external review to ensure the integrity of high-quality, evidence-based publications but peer review training is not part of the medical school or residency curriculum. Additionally, there is no agreement on the level of expertise or experience for peer reviewers.1,2

Methods
Monthly Journal Club, a required component of the Palliative Care Fellowship, has been utilized for the past three academic years as a training ground for evaluation of blinded submitted, unpublished manuscripts. Journal Club is headed by the JPM Editor-in-Chief (EIC), who is also director of the fellowship program, and the JPM Managing Editor.

A ‘Classic’ article in palliative medicine is chosen to illustrate both high quality research methods and important results. A manuscript submitted to Journal of Palliative Medicine is also selected by the EIC and Managing Editor. The fellows are deputized by the EIC to assist in peer review of the article. Palliative Fellows and pharmacy residents evaluate, discuss, and debate the merits of the submitted paper. One member of the group writes the critique based on the class discussion.

Fellows and pharmacy residents from years 2016-2019 were selected to participate in a survey about their peer review training experience.

Results
A nine-question survey was prepared and sent to twenty-five trainees. Questions were designed to determine any previous peer review experience prior to the Journal Club sessions, gauge usefulness of the experience, and determine if the training prepared participants to become independent peer reviewers. Sixteen Palliative Medicine Fellows and three Pharmacy Residents completed the survey. Of the nineteen respondents, six had experience as a peer reviewer prior to the monthly Journal Club sessions. 89.47% (17) strongly agreed that the experience of reviewing/comparing both a “classic” paper and an unpublished paper added to the learning experience and found the real time interactive discussion helpful. 84.21% (16) strongly agreed their opinion was respected in the group setting and 73.68% (14) felt they had a better understanding of the peer review process after the training. 36.84% (7) strongly agreed that the training received prepared them to independently review for biomedical journals while 47.37% (9) would like feedback/mentoring on reviews they have written.

Conclusions
- The pilot demonstrated that an educational intervention for peer review within an established education session is viewed as valuable and can be implemented without putting added burden on fellowship training.
- Twenty-five new reviewers, trained according to our standards, were added to our reviewer database.
- Fellowship Directors and faculty could use this approach by requesting a submitted paper to review while working within their own Journal Clubs to evaluate a submitted, unpublished paper as a group.
- While the respondents thought that the training received during the year-long monthly Journal Club sessions prepared them to independently review for biomedical journals, a large percent would like to receive additional feedback/mentoring on their reviews.

References
2. Callaham ML and Tercier J. The relationship of previous training and experience of journal peer reviewers to subsequent review quality. PLOS Medicine. 1/30/2007: https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.0040040