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If You Want to Publish, Be Part of the Process

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The edifice of academic journals is predicated on the process of peer review. Inevitably it is subject to the vagaries of the individual perspectives and biases of the reviewers. However, there has not been a useful, equitable or viable alternative that would secure a level of quality control in the research domain (1). Given the inevitable human components of range of knowledge, potential biases and sometimes lazy thinking, it is certainly not a perfect system. Certainly, a worthy paper occasionally is rejected, or a badly flawed paper is accepted. However, in the absence of a better process, it is the gold standard.

Historically, peer review has been an altruistic endeavor. Researchers understood that their reviews contributed to the scientific process by improving the quality of reported information and providing an imprimatur to the reported findings (2); reviewing was an obligation to the scientific community (3). However, there are other benefits to reviewing a paper. These include discovering new insights or approaches to a particular topic, improvement in one's own writing skills by reading the work of others, and use as a tool for teaching trainees to analyze strengths and weaknesses of a study (4).

Despite the importance of peer review, it is the bane of virtually all scientific journals, and its expeditious functioning is approaching crisis levels. Most journals request that reviews be returned within 2 weeks of acceptance. However, in many cases this is wishful thinking, and reviews often are received far in excess of 2 weeks. This results in long delays in a publication decision; in our experience, it sometimes can exceed 6 months. Most delays in review are related to searching for reviewers and constantly reminding them to submit their review on time (5). As current editors for a sleep journal as well as having served as editors for other journals, we have sent up to 50 review invitations for some papers. Other editors confirm that finding reviewers is increasingly difficult for all journals (6).

There are two major factors that have led to this crisis. First is the proliferation of scientific journals. For example, ten years ago there were at least 15 sleep journals which was an increase of 9 over the preceding decade (7). There are even more now, and this does not include journals that only publish some sleep content such as the *Southwest Journal of Pulmonary, Critical Care and Sleep*, *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*, or *Neurology*. Each of these journals needs reviewers for the papers submitted to them. Second is researchers and academic

clinicians over the past several decades have been placed under increasing pressure to generate external funding whether it be grants or clinical income. A few decades ago, being invited to review an important article would have been viewed as a recognition of a degree of competence. Today, it is considered a burden in that there is no time to perform non-remunerative work (3).

Are there any means to alleviate this crisis? We offer the following possibilities:

- An expectation that anyone who publishes in a journal must agree to review a predetermined number of papers in order to submit subsequent manuscripts. This number would likely vary among journals, but we propose that it be a minimum of 3 reviews.
- For journals that charge an article publishing fee, discounts for publishing or other monetary incentive are provided to reviewers who provide expeditious and high-quality reviews. Some journals currently do this, but it is unclear whether these incentives are effective.
- In addition to a requirement by academic bodies to list publications on one's vita, there should be a list of reviews submitted including the journal's name and impact factor and the review date.
- Academic institutions require a minimum number of manuscript reviews as an essential criterion for promotion or retention.
- Academic institutions should be encouraged to provide training in the process of writing a scientific article AND the approach to reviewing and evaluating a manuscript.
- Explore the possibility of using generative artificial intelligence to assist in conducting some aspects of peer review (8).

No doubt that there are other novel concepts and journals should adopt policies that will be effective for their own stakeholders. In the meantime, we strongly urge readers of this editorial to be generous with their time and regularly accept requests to review papers. Your efforts will be greatly appreciated by journal editors, and you will be assisting in the dissemination of science as well as fostering your own personal growth as a researcher or academic clinician.

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