

Obligations of Editors and Editorial Board Members: A Gentle Reminder

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The current editorial is an attempt to prompt the journal offices and to remind themselves of their editorial commitments towards the authors. Furthermore, this need to be clarified here that it is not applicable to all journal offices and the examples going to be discussed in the preceding section are only handful. To summarize our viewpoint, following are the examples of editorial practices that are observed by authors submitting manuscripts to peer review journals.

Delays in editorial/initial/peer review

First and foremost, the factor of time is a strongly debatable issue. The time taken for initial peer review is needlessly lengthy and in fact, the waiting time for review is perceived as a barrier in submitting the research and review manuscripts to quality journals. We do recognize and understand the 'deadline-oriented responsibilities' of editorial team but this is what they commit to when they accept editorial responsibilities. The editors have to realize that authors are also in consistent struggle with various timelines and if eerily unprincipled practice of 'delayed editorial review phase' (i.e. manuscripts remain in initial review for months) is nurtured, the authors are liable to face consequences in terms of delayed or no job extensions, graduation and/or promotion.

Another issue which is also related to timeline is related to delayed review. Once the manuscript remains in review for months and gets rejected, it is submitted to other journal. A usual objection from the new journal is regarding the timeline of data collection as it is already considered old. It is very hard to convince the editors about the delay in timeline; hence decreasing the chances of acceptance. It is understandable that peer review is a volunteered process and many times editors face hardships in getting acceptance from reviewers. However, with a big pool of reviewers, this is the editorial job to make sure that the reviewers submit the reports in time. To overcome such issues, we request for the expansion of editorial boards as this will provide additional strength to the existing editorial pool. Moreover, a vibrant picture of the review process is necessitated and requested to be presented to the authors about the timeline of initial editorial and/or peer review process. This can make the authors clearer to decide either to carry on with the journal or submit it to another platform.

Selection of reviewers

For this current editorial, we had sessions and personal communications with different authors regarding the selection of reviewers in publication. A major concern for the authors is the inappropriate selection of reviewers by the journal office. A common example in this regard is the physically and morally tiring process of publishing qualitative research. The qualitative manuscripts are often sent to reviewers that are not trained as qualitative researchers. Hence, the manuscripts are rejected based on non-scientific grounds.

Outdated instructions and additional requirements

It is of common observation that instruction to authors provided at the journals' webpage are not regularly updated that results in in-house rejection as the authors fail to comply with the journals' requirements. We have to remember that constructing a manuscript as per journals' guidelines is a time-taking process and it is the responsibility of the journal office to make sure that information is regularly updated. In many cases, the authors have to restructure their manuscript because the information is not rationalized on the web pages.

Nowadays, another concern for the authors is language editing services. We are in agreement that language is an important concern and the editorial board is not there to check language or structure-related errors. A number of editing options however are presented by editorial board. Language editing is expensive and once the required manuscript undergoes language and structure-related clearance, rejecting the manuscript based on language-related issues is highly distressful. Our concern is not about the acceptance of the manuscript but the rejection reasons needs to be scientific.

Universal reasoning of rejection

Last but not the least, every time a manuscript is rejected 'universal statements' are received from the editorial board and no methodical or systematic grounds are provided. Additionally, authors are encouraged to submit further research to the journal. If the reasons of rejection are unknown to the authors, it is highly likely that the authors will not turn to that journal again. We recommend the editorial board to provide the reasons of rejection so that the authors can modify the new version of the manuscript accordingly.

SUMMARY

The Helsinki declaration highlights that authors, editors and publishers all have ethical obligations with regard to the publication process.^[1] When it comes to authors and ethical issues, a retraction, submissions ban and/or contacting the relevant institution is a common norm. However, obligations of the editorial board are discussed occasionally in literature and there is no available directive to follow if such misconduct is reported. Same as to the authors' ethical responsibility, the editorial board is accountable to ensure that submitted material is handled uprightly and timely to provide assurance that manuscripts are scrutinized solely on the scientific quality. Therefore, equal abiding of the principles by the editors and the authors is important right from the time of manuscript preparation, submission followed by final decision. This will nurture the integrity of the research process as publication remains an integral part of academic and research related success.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors of this editorial are avid researchers and are on the editorial board / international advisory panels for a number of peer reviewed journals. No conflict of interest is reported.

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Received: 10 December 2018;

Accepted: 20 January 2019

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Cite this article as: Saleem F, Hassali MA, Ahmed A, Khan MU. Obligations of Editors and Editorial Board Members: A Gentle Reminder. J Pharm Pract Community Med. 2019;5(1):1-2.