



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Peer-review: Considerations to Candal-Pedreira et al.'s proposals



Revisión por pares: consideraciones a las propuestas de Candal-Pedreira et al

Dear Editor:

I have read the article about peer reviewing of manuscripts submitted to medical journals with interest.¹ I would like to comment on some aspects that may have been surprising or confusing for some readers.

In the article, references to editors and management (the “director” or editor-in-chief) can be confusing. The authors state that the editor-in-chief is responsible for choosing the editors. However, they attribute the responsibility for “coordinating and overseeing the entire editorial process” and making “the final decisions regarding publication” to editors. These are the responsibilities of the editor-in-chief, who is ultimately responsible for everything that is published. The authors noted that editors usually were clinicians or even researchers in the field covered by the journal. This may be optimal for clinical publications and common in journals published by medical professional associations. But there are highly prestigious journals (e.g., *Nature Medicine*, *Lancet Respiratory Medicine*) where editors work exclusively for the journal and do not combine their editorial work with clinical practice or academia.

I feel that the errors that Candal-Pedreira et al attribute to the use of inexperienced reviewers (deficient evaluation of research methods and the rejection of “good” articles due to excessively detailed review) are not necessarily related to the expertise of reviewers. There may be experienced reviewers who are not able to detect certain methodological flaws, as many expert clinicians are not as knowledgeable about research methods or, if they are, they may have certain gaps (e.g., advanced statistics). On the other hand, being meticulous is not negative in and of itself. As an author, I prefer to be given extensive feedback (even for the smallest concerns) to be able to reflect on them and respond as I deem appropriate. In my experience, “fastidious” reviewers are those who devote the most time to examining the work, something that should always be appreciated.

I am not sure that I fully understand the proposal to create a “reviewer academy”. It is not practical to leave training in the hands of each individual journal. On the other hand, training courses are already available in publisher websites (e.g., Wiley, Springer Nature, Taylor and Francis), and there are even “certified” courses (e.g., Elsevier Research Academy). In addition, the Equator Network provides information on peer review trainings and resources.² There are also publishers (such as Springer Nature) that make reviewers follow certain pre-established steps and fill out specific fields (ranging from a critique of the abstract to the appropriateness of the statistical analysis) in the review feedback forms. Such templates are very useful, as they ensure that reviewers do not fail to address any of those aspects.

In the conclusion, the authors proposed “creating incentives, recognising and possibly remunerating in some form the work of reviewers”. While they mentioned several ways to incentivise and recognise review work throughout the article, this is the first time they suggest that it could be “remunerated”, which the reader ought to interpret as “paid”. It would have been worth it for the authors to broach this controversial aspect in the depth that it deserves.

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Some thoughts on peer review. Authors reply



Algunas reflexiones sobre la revisión por pares. Respuesta de los autores

Dear Editor:

We would like to start by remarking that any debate, as long as it is respectful, is enriching, especially on a subject suitable for it as is the review of scientific articles. Thus, we will proceed to share our perspective regarding some of the aspects mentioned in the letter¹ sent in response to our article, “Challenges in peer review: How to guarantee the quality and transparency of the editorial process in scientific journals”.²

We do not think that there is any confusion regarding the duties of the editorial director and the editors of a scientific journal, although we ought to highlight that the responsibilities of each of these roles may vary depending on the journal. In general, editors are the ones that make decisions regarding peer review and recommendations regarding the publication of submitted manuscripts. The editor-in-chief usually supports the editors’ decisions and does not change their recommendations, as one of the cornerstones in the functioning of the editorial system is the trust of the editor-in-chief in every member of the editorial team, so that changing their decisions would make little sense. Although there may be exceptions, this is the general rule. The Council of Science Editors,³ in fact, establishes that editors are responsible for making editorial decisions. It is worth noting that the profile of editors is diverse and we recognise that in some of the most prestigious journals editors are exclusively dedicated to the journal, but they receive financial remuneration for their work. However, this is not a common situation, as editors in most journals need to balance their editorial responsibilities with their clinical, academic or research work.

The issue of peer review is also very complex. On one hand, it is difficult to have peers accept articles to review (reaching out to 10 reviewers to have only one or two accept is a common occurrence). To our knowledge, there is no research on the time elapsed from the moment that peers are invited to review an article and the time they confirm their participation, or the time elapsed until reviewers submit their feedback. In our opinion, and based on our editorial experience, the time devoted to the search of reviewers and their acceptance may exceed the time devoted to the review itself.

On the other hand, the need for trained reviewers is also widely acknowledged.^{4,5} In a survey of reviewers, 68% stated that formal training could be helpful for peer review.⁶ However, previous studies have concluded that training and mentorship in peer review do not seem to be effective,⁷ which may be due to how this training is delivered. We agree that there are numerous courses on how to perform peer reviews, although they are not required for engaging in the task, so the decision to get training rests on the reviewer. Thus, it is our belief that new initiatives must be undertaken in this field, such as a reviewer academy. It should be noted that this idea is not completely new, for in Spain, for instance, the journal *Gaceta Sanitaria* implemented something of the kind for years.⁸ The creation of a “pool” of reviewers trained in a journal or publishing house is one possible option. On the other hand, we agree that some journals facilitate the peer review process more than others. Therefore, we think that establishing a common template for the review of scientific content shared across journals would facilitate the task of reviewers, a strategy we proposed recently.⁹

As for the remuneration of peer reviewers, delving into the subject exceeded the scope and allotted length of our manuscript, although it is debated in multiple forums. One of the suggested forms of remuneration is offering discounts in article processing charges to authors that have played a significant role as reviewers in the journal, and direct payment by the journal to the reviewer has also been proposed.⁵ Although the latter option is controversial,^{5,10} it is clear that reviewers should be compensated for their work, although there seems to be no consensus as to the optimal way to do it.

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