



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Peer accreditation and payment: A hand-in-hand solution to the peer crisis



La acreditación y el pago de los pares: medidas complementarias en respuesta a la crisis de la revisión por pares

Dear Editor,

Candal-Pedreira et al. candidly discussed the challenges faced by peer review and the responsibilities of editors in ensuring that the peer-reviewed label is truthful.¹ I elaborate on the professionalization of peer reviewers. Their professional backgrounds and experience, either as researchers or as peer reviewers, vary widely.² Yet, as Candal-Pedreira et al. noted, no international system of professionalization and accreditation exists. Coupled with the mostly voluntary (i.e., unremunerative) nature of the peer review process, a broad range of peer reviewers of varying qualifications are entrusted with screening and approving the bulk of scientific knowledge in the most important scientific databases (e.g., PubMed, Web of Science, Scopus), and since the process is mostly not open, peer reviewers cannot be held directly accountable.

Rather than the suggestion made by Candal-Pedreira et al. to appoint the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and/or the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) as the bodies responsible for establishing an international accreditation system for peer review, I propose an independent body of scientists take on the task of peer review training in order to make the balance of peer review-related power and fortune fair and equitable. The envisioned International Peer Review Accreditation Board (IPRAB) would have at least three specialists per research field to lead the accreditation course, which should include three components: 1) a thorough examination of each candidate's background and an evaluation to determine whether their *curriculum vitae* is truthful, validated and updated;³ 2) a comprehensive course offering training on basic aspects of what to expect in peer review, specific aspects of different manuscript types that peer reviewers should examine thoroughly, the ability to detect fraud and fake or manipulated aspects of scientific papers and language and communica-

tion skills to allow reviewers to communicate their ideas cordially and professionally; 3) a test involving both a legitimate paper and a hypothetical paper in which flaws, manipulations and errors are purposefully introduced to allow the candidate to assess valid and fictitious content. The test would be completed in real time and on camera to preclude cheating.

Based on 1–3, candidates would then be assigned a score and classified accordingly into categories A to F, where A stands for the highest level of accreditation. Combined with open peer review and a bold approach to the reform of journal quality control systems,⁴ this proposal—which, evidently, needs to be fleshed out to resolve many particulars—could give rise to a peer pool that has been trained, tested and properly accredited. To ensure that IPRAB-accredited peer reviewers are continuously appraised, a new test would need to be taken annually. Accreditation could also be lost. Journals should avoid using non-IPRAB-accredited peer reviewers. An annual open report could be published by the journal showing the number and ranks of IPRAB-accredited peer reviewers that it employed. Depending on the journal's business model, it would pay a nominal annual fee to IPRAP (i.e., post-service payment) that would be proportional to the number and rank of accredited peers, which would allow the accreditation body to be sustainable, ensuring a balanced peer-editor-journal-publisher interaction.

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Conflict of interest

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The standard peer-review system needs to be reformulated towards a more efficient peer-review system



El sistema establecido de revisión de pares ha de reformularse para llegar a otro más eficiente

Dear Editor,

We would like to thank Dr Teixeira da Silva¹ for his comments on our paper,² which contributed to enrich the debate on peer review with the aim of improving its quality and peer participation and performance. However, we have some reservations about certain aspects of the proposal, as we consider that they are either not new or not feasible.

First, we believe it is unnecessary to create new organizations. Instead, it would be more efficient and practical to establish a committee within an existing established organization (i.e., COPE, WAME, ICMJE). This approach would avoid duplicating efforts and resources, while bolstering the recognition and visibility of the committee.

Second, the proposal, though interesting in some parts, has some arbitrary points that are not based on evidence. Why 3 specialists for each expert field, instead of 5 or 7? What is the definition of a research field? Which is the level of detail of such experts? Different fields would need a proportionate number of experts for any specialty or subspecialty within them.

A further issue is related to the payments by journals. While it makes sense to suggest a nominal fee to the IPRAP based on the number and rank of reviewers, some journals do not have a for-profit business model, and therefore they could not pay such reviewers. In journals which are for-profit, how much would the fee be? This would also depend on the number of manuscripts received per journal. The greater the number of papers submitted, the greater the expenditure in reviewers. Would this mean that top journals that receive a high number of papers should invest

more money on peer review compared to journals with a lower impact factor, even though the latter may publish more papers? It is also crucial to consider financial compensation for editors, who play an essential role in the process. Furthermore, we have concerns regarding the availability of accredited reviewers in cases where an article is rejected by multiple journals, depleting the pool of trained reviewers in that field. Would this mean that the article could not be published? In addition, the proposed accreditation process seems complex and time-consuming, which could be discouraging for potential reviewers, especially if it must be repeated annually.

We do agree with Dr Teixeira da Silva that it is unfair that while some publishers are making a lot of money publishing journals, mainly through author fees, peer review work is done completely for free, and new mechanisms to avoid this should be established. However, we believe it is important to consider the limitations of the presented proposal.

We strongly believe that the peer review system can be substantially improved, which would entail not only the skills of reviewers but also how peer review is performed (anonymous or open process), the facilitation of peer review by journals (by using a common template for reviews³) and making peer reviews available to the audience (whether the identity of the reviewers is disclosed or not). We think that the whole scientific community should reflect on the accountability of the current peer review system and on different ways to sustain yet correct it.

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