

Peer Review in the Journals Published by Chinese Medical Association: Experiences and Challenges

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Outline

- Brief Introduction of the Journals Published by CMA
- Peer Review Process and Principles Adopted by CMA Journals
- Quality Control
- Improvement Measures

CMA Journals

- The first published journal 《Chinese Medical Journal》 was launched in 1887, the oldest medical journal in China
- 140 paper journals + 43 electronic journals
- Belong to CMA and its specialty societies
- Most indexed by China core periodicals of science and technology
- 25 indexed by Medline, 2 indexed by SCI

Peer Review Process

- **In-office review:** full-time editors do text similarity check to avoid duplicate publication and plagiarism, then evaluate the importance and scientific value to determine if it should be sent to external expert peer review. less than 30% rejected within 2 weeks

Peer Review Process

- **External expert peer review:** Full-time editors select reviewers from the members of editorial board and the reviewer database, then simultaneously send to 2 experts asking for their opinions; if different, send to third expert; about 30% rejected within 1–3 months

Peer Review Process

- Group decision-making: papers approved by the individual external experts are presented in a live meeting. A group of editorial members and one or two statisticians living in the same city with the editorial office were invited to attend the meeting
- The group meeting usually held once a month or every two months, depending on frequency of publication
- Group meeting is chaired by the Editor-in-Chief, who makes the final decision of Acceptance, Revision or Rejection

Peer Review Principles

- **Precision:** select the right reviewers who have done the same research with the reviewed paper
- **Cross-over:** reviewed by experts in different regions
- **Evasion:** experts who have conflict of interest with the reviewed papers should be avoided
- **Separation:** all the members of editorial board should be invited to review papers to avoid heavy burden
- **Confidentiality:** reviewers are required not to discuss, use or forward papers to others

Peer Review Methods

- **Single-blind review:** 2/3
- **Double-blind review:** 1/3
- **Quantitative review**(providing checklist for grading) : some
- **Open review:** not used; plan to investigate the acceptability of signed review among reviewers
- **Suggested reviewers:** authors are not allowed to suggest reviewers, but can suggest “not to be reviewed” by some experts

Criteria to Evaluate

- Important topic
- Innovative idea or finding
- Scientifically sound
- Practically useful
- Materials complete and readable
- In recent years, attention has focused on integrity and ethics

Editorial vs. Expert Decision Making

- Traditionally, reviewer's opinions help editors to make the final decision, but in our process, group experts do it. Although experts had frank and meaningful discussion, but there are some shortcomings:
 - Usually takes more time
 - Sometimes, may limit innovative ideas
 - Focused on specific paper, not the whole issue or volume
- *Question:* who should make the final decision? Full-time editors or part-time members of the editorial board?

Quality Control

- Maintain reviewer database: more than 10,000 editorial board members with detailed information; evaluate and record review quality dynamically
- Provide best practice materials and review item checklist
- Give feedback and final opinions to reviewers
- Encourage appeals from authors

Challenges

- Peer review process and principles should be more detailed in Authors Instructions to make it more transparency to authors
- Reviewers should declare conflicts of interest when they became members
- Measures should be adopted to encourage innovation and debate
- More attention should be paid to integrity and ethical problems
- Review quality should be improved

Improvement Measures on Ethics

- Committee of Publication Ethics of Chinese Medical Journals
- Based on international principles, the Chinese Recommendations on the following areas have been provided:
 - Authorship
 - Conflicts of interest
 - Institutional review board approval and subject protection
 - Duplicate submission and redundant publication
 - Peer review
 - Anti-plagiarism
 - Retraction