International Congress on Peer Review and Biomedical Publication

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There are many published studies on ways of improving the quality of reporting, understanding the editorial decision making, journal indexing and citation, ethics and publication bias. It is essential that we keep abreast of the literature so that we can improve our personal reporting skills and learn successful biomedical publication practices. This is especially relevant for educators, researchers, authors, peer reviewers and editors. This literature may also provide us with essential information that will direct us on how to improve our scientific journal, The Radiographer.

On 10th–12th September 2009 I attended the 6th International Congress on Peer Review and Biomedical Publication in the beautiful city of Vancouver, Canada. I also attended the pre-congress workshop facilitated by members of The EQUATOR Network on the key guidelines for reporting health research studies and the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) meeting. There were 425 participants from 32 countries from various biomedical disciplines including nursing, allied health and medicine.

The EQUATOR Network

Enhancing the QUAlity and Transparency Of health Research Network, which is also known as The EQUATOR Network is a non-profit organisation that is led by experts in the area of research methodology, reporting and publishing. The primary goal of The EQUATOR Network workshop was for the participants to understand the importance of transparent and accurate reporting of health research and learn the key concepts of reporting guidelines. We were given manuscripts to read prior to the meeting and in the workshop we were divided into small groups where we used the appropriate reporting checklist to assess the quality of the manuscripts. In 2008, 38% (62/165) of high impact medical journals such as the Annals of Internal Medicine endorse the use of reporting guidelines. They have included in their instructions to authors The EQUATOR Network website, www.equator-network.org so that peer reviewers, editors and authors can access the appropriate reporting guidelines to assess the quality of the manuscript.

6th International Congress on Peer Review and Biomedical Publication

Every four years a congress on peer review and biomedical publication is held with the aim “…to improve the quality and credibility of biomedical peer review and publication and to help
advance the efficiency, effectiveness, and equitability of the dissemination of biomedical information throughout the world.”

There were many relevant papers that were presented of which some are listed in the table below.

At the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) meeting, case studies were presented for expert panel discussion such as self-plagiarism and the publications of unregistered clinical trials. The following interesting case study was presented for discussion.

The corresponding author wrote to the editor that an additional name needed to be included in the authorship list. The additional author is the head of the department whose contribution to the manuscript was editing and approving the manuscript for publication. What actions should the editor do?

The expert panels discussed the authorship guideline of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE). An author must meet the following three conditions to be eligible for authorship: (1) substantial contribution to the study design, data collection, data analysis or data interpretation; (2) drafting the manuscript or intellectual input into writing the manuscript and (3) approving the final version of the manuscript. For more information about the uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals, go to www.icmje.org.

In the congress opportunities were given for the participants to showcase their journals. I therefore promoted our journal by displaying copies of The Radiographer.

Directions for future research

Almost all of the presentations at the congress were about medical journals with high impact factor. It was in fact recognised at the congress that little or no research is conducted on small biomedical journals. Generally, a journal that publishes four issues a year or less is considered small (however the characteristics of a small journal hasn’t been formally investigated and defined). Most of the medical radiation sciences journals are small in size and some like The Radiographer are also not widely accessible.

One of the contributing factors for the success of the bigger journals is the continuous evaluation, monitoring and improvement of their processes. The processes of small journals need to also be investigated and if appropriate make the necessary changes to achieve the journal objectives.

The World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) is currently promoting collaborative research amongst the small biomedical journals. They are encouraging editors to submit their research proposal to WAME for consideration.

Conclusion

I would highly encourage readers with an interest in peer review or biomedical publication to read some of the research in this area. The abstracts of the presented oral and poster presentations can be accessed at www.jama-peer.org.

The congress organisers, The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) and British Medical Journal (BMJ) also publishes the scientific presentations from the congress and many other reports about the science of peer review and biomedical publication. The full-text articles can be accessed free of charge directly from the journal website at www.jama.ama-assn.org (JAMA) and www.bmj.com (BMJ).

Readers are also encouraged to visit the website of WAME, www.wame.org where information about peer review education and training can be found. In addition, The EQUATOR Network provides education and training on how to use reporting guidelines. In their website, www.equator-network.org the reporting guidelines can also be accessed free of charge.

Acknowledgement

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References


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<th>Theme</th>
<th>Examples of presented Abstracts</th>
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| Authorship | • Reader interpretation of an author’s role based on authorship order  
• Prevalence of ghost writers (unacknowledged contributor) and honorary authorship (no contribution to the paper but is an author) |
| Peer Review | • Evaluations on the quality of peer review  
• Mentoring programs for new peer reviewers and its effect on the quality of peer review |
| Editorial Training, Decisions, Policies and Ethics | • Understanding the decision making process of journal editors and the editorial review boards  
• Cases brought forward by the journal editors to the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) for discussion and resolution (such as data fabrication and authorship) |
| Publication Bias | • Peer reviewer bias and journal bias in accepting studies with positive results and rejecting studies that show no improvement.  
• Gender differences in editorial reviewer behaviour  
• Reasons why investigators do not publish their studies (which includes fear of journal rejection) |
| Rhetoric | • Identifying the frequency of “spin” (ie The author(s) attempt to persuade the reader. The text description of the results does not reflect the numerical data in the article) |
| Quality of Reporting | • Effectiveness of reporting guidelines  
• Evaluations on the quality of reporting of medical journals  
• Frequency by which published reports acknowledges study limitations  
• Development of the study protocol guideline called SPIRIT (Standard Protocol Items for Randomised Trials) |
| Post Publication Citation, Indexing, Responses and Online Publishing | • Open access journals (or free online access to full-text articles) and its impact to the number of submissions, advertising revenue, number of readers, publication time, international contribution (by authors and peer reviewers) and impact factor  
• The country of origin of journals from Medline and Embase |
| Retractions | • Frequency and reasons for journals retracting articles (such as honest research errors) |