EDITORIAL COMMENT

Recognition in Peer Review

A scholarly journal is largely dependent on the proficiency and quality of its subject specialists – the reviewers. Editors around the world, however, are voicing their frustration due to reviewers' non-responses, missing of deadlines, and declining requests, which inadvertently cause delays in turn-around times. As SAJOT publishes a wide spectrum of specialities relevant to the scope of occupational therapy practice, it is imperative that we expand on our reviewer database to include a variety of specialists with relevant interests and experience who are willing to undertake this important task for us. The question is, are we exploiting the altruism of peer reviewers without offering any tangible benefits for their services? Are (largely automated) 'thank you' emails from journal editors an adequate recognition of their time and effort and does it provide enough motivation to repeatedly do the time-consuming hard work of peer review?

Current 'recognition' practices take on many forms:
- The appointment of a reviewer by an editor is viewed as the first step in recognising the contribution he or she can make.
- Editors making a decision based on the reviewers' recommendations and thereby validating (recognising) the reviewers' comments; and/or
- Authors addressing the comments/suggestions made by reviewers and thanking them either via their response letter or publicly under the Acknowledgements section (even if they don't know their names)[1].

Some journals also issue a Reviewer Certificate (or as is the case with SAJOT, CPD certificates), have a 'reviewer of the year' award which they showcase on their website, or offer free access to subscription journals for a short period[1].

Another question, asked by Irfanullah is whether recognition in peer review is a static thing, or could it be transformed into something else? Each act of peer review could have an incremental effect in instances where recognition is publicly displayed, as this can gradually contribute to building the reputation of each individual reviewer.

SAJOT is currently considering several models which have recently either been instituted or put forward to offer peer-reviewers better public recognition for their voluntary contributions to scholarly publications. Without public recognition, reviewers may become loath to accept reviews.

Many journals have internal reviewer databases which are publicly displayed. Publons for example, supports peer-review recognition by hosting reviewers' profiles, rating them, identifying them as mentors, offering awards, and collaborating with other agencies, such as ORCID.

Some publishers have been practicing open review for fifteen to twenty years. The British Medical Journal was the first to disclose reviewer identities and publish peer review reports. In a randomised trial studying the effects of this sort of reviewing transparency, they found that open review had no effect on the technical quality of the review, there was a decline in willingness to review, and that the practice had a small positive effect on the tone and constructiveness of reviews[2].

Preprint servers, which have been around for almost three decades, are changing recognition in peer-review by making open peer-review a more organised, credible, and community-based venture. "Peer review is no longer strictly a pre-publication exercise. It can now be part of post-publication workflow, even an action taken before data collection"[1:1].

Kiermer and Muddit[3] highlight some of the advantages of an open peer-review system, stating that when the identities of peer-reviewers are known, accountability for the content and rigour of the research extends beyond the authors; it offers reviewers the opportunity to claim credit for their contributions; and as a result, improves the quality of review reports. However, there are risks involved. In open peer-review systems, reviewers might be less likely to give critical feedback which could affect the rigour and candour of the review report.

Although identity and credit are intertwined, in many instances, peer-reviewers are given the option as to whether they want their identities revealed or not. In order to keep the process double blind, these identities are only revealed after publication of the article.

By integrating with ORCID, reviewer profiles can be updated by a third party (such as the publisher or journal), by providing proof of review services, making it verifiable and trustworthy. This verification can include a date range, a publisher's name rather than that of the journal, etc., so as not to sacrifice anonymity[2].

Peer reviewer input is a bone fide academic activity, and it should be publicly recognised by funders, tenure, and promotion systems at institutions. We can no longer expect reviewers to repeatedly contribute to what we publish through their sense of academic and professional sense of responsibility alone.

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