

## Open Peer Review of Manuscripts Submitted to Journals for Publication: The Only Way of Setting the Record of Contribution to Science Straight Enough

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I am pleased Medical Education Online (MEO)<sup>1</sup> has recently introduced open peer review of preprint versions of manuscripts submitted for publication alongside the conventional peer review process. How this process works is noted in MEO's Submission Section.<sup>2</sup> Constructive comments, criticisms, and suggestions made by external peer reviewers and review editors amount to substantial intellectual contribution that shapes up a manuscript for publication. While authors often acknowledge constructive comments by reviewers in the article that is eventually published, the actual contribution of reviewers or review editors is itself not made public. For example, the British Medical Journal has a policy of open peer review,<sup>3</sup> if peer reviewers are willing to sign their reviews, there is no reason why they would mind their reviews being published. In this regard, I appreciate the fact that the American Journal of Hypertension publishes reviewer critiques of at least some of the research articles along with the accepted articles. Please see the latest issue<sup>4</sup> of this journal for examples of this. Although they serve additional functions, reviewers' comments on manuscripts submitted for publication have all the attributes that "letters to the editor" on articles published in journals have.

We should expect a system of open peer review of manuscripts submitted to journals to help the scientific community in more than one way: one, it should improve the quality of the reviews because it "raises" the accountability of reviewers who would themselves be reviewed; two, more people may review a manuscript because of the credit associated with having one's comments published; three, articles would likely be reviewed faster and this should reduce the time taken by journal editors to make decisions regarding acceptance of the article and eventually reduce the time to publication; and finally, it sets the stage for healthy debate amongst all people involved. In case, reviewers have concerns about the integrity of the reported research or have other

concerns that merit responses from the authors before they are publicized, they would, of course, transmit them confidentially to the editors alone. Similarly, reviewers' concerns about writing style and other minor errors in manuscripts could be channeled to the authors through editors without being publicized.

Furthermore, I also feel that reviews of articles that are initially accepted for external peer review but rejected after review should remain publicly viewable to keep the record intact. When authors prepare rejected manuscripts for publication in other journals, they should (if it is appropriate) submit them along with the comments previously published elsewhere and indicate how they have responded to them; this way, it will again reduce the time taken to publication of articles that were rejected by other journals.

The core attributes of an only open peer review process complement the philosophy of contributorship over the conventional authorship model in publication. I believe that this innovative model of review is the only way to setting the record of individuals' contributions to science straight enough because it will ensure that due credit is given to reviewers and editors and they would also remain publicly accountable for their work just as authors have to be. If it works, we may be able to do away with the conventional peer review process in the near future! I would encourage all journals to experiment with such a policy, and it may only be a matter of time before everyone involved is comfortable and happy with it.

### References

1. Available from: <http://www.webcitation.org/5NG6xAFVn> accessed 11 Mar 2007.
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Prakash, ES. Open peer review of manuscripts submitted to journals for publication: the only way of setting the record of contribution to science straight enough.

Med Educ Online [serial online] 2007;11  
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