State of the journal report

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Statistics tell the tale

Journals are judged in many ways depending on who is doing the assessment. Obviously, what is important for readers is not often the same as what matters most to authors. Readers want high quality, timely, well written material, presented in a pleasing format. Some readers are only interested in topics in which they have a special interest; others have broader tastes. Authors want prompt decisions based on detailed, thoughtful, and fair reviews. If their paper is accepted, they want rapid publication. Some authors are bewitched by impact factors; others are willing to accept their own assessment of the quality of journals to which they send their papers. A third constituency that editors ignore at their peril is reviewers. I assume they want a system that is easy to use, that provides good feedback, and one in which they are assured their opinions are valued.

It is just over one year since the journal moved to a web based system of submissions and reviews, as well as an opportunity to view all material online. Although I have commented previously on how this has changed our lives,¹ it seems appropriate to now provide a report card on how well we perform. I am pleased to do so because for the most part it seems we are doing extremely well. Besides, Bench>Press makes it relatively painless to assemble the statistics used to tell the tale. These statistics permit you to judge the efficiency of my office and staff and the performance of authors and reviewers.

SUBMISSIONS

In the last year we have received 262 submissions from authors in more than 40 countries. As might be expected, the US accounted for about 40%, the UK for 8%, Canada for 12%, and Australia for 8%.

EDITORIAL OFFICE PERFORMANCE

On average, we take nine days until a paper is under review and 34 days for all

reviews to be completed. The first decision follows about four days later. I screen all papers on arrival and for many I seek a second opinion from another editor before deciding whether to proceed to review. Many are rejected at this screening stage.

For any journal, one key statistic is the percentage of papers accepted for publication. Our acceptance rate is 32%. An additional 19% are accepted without review because they are commissioned, letters, editorials, and the like. (In the last six months this statistic has fallen to 8%.) Included in the 18% are papers for supplements, which although each is peer reviewed, acceptance is typically a "package deal". Altogether 23% of all papers submitted are rejected without review—a figure that is rapidly climbing—and 27% are rejected after review.

When considering these statistics two points need to be understood: we try to strike a balance between maintaining a high scientific standard and playing a responsible role in encouraging research in the field. We are especially likely to behave generously towards authors from countries outside the mainstream of contributors to this literature. The balance occasionally involves encouraging resubmission along the lines of a brief report or research letter. (In addition, though not reflected in these statistics, in the future we expect to include in most issues a program evaluation with an accompanying critique.)

AUTHOR PERFORMANCE

Although the average time from submission to acceptance is 66.5 days . . . a mouth-watering number for most authors . . . this key statistic is distorted by the fact that it takes 54 days from the time I ask for a revision until one arrives. (This either shows how difficult it is for authors to deal with the tough challenges reviewers pose or how much time they spend on other distractions, like watching hockey games!) For example, over the period in question, we asked for

69 revisions, 15 of which needed further revision. Once we get a revision it is turned over quickly—usually within two weeks.

REVIEWER PERFORMANCE

We requested 535 reviews over this period, and 404 of those asked agreed. On average reviewers take 5.2 days to accept and 7.6 days to decline. More importantly, 62% were completed on time—that is, within three weeks; 11% were one week late; and another 10% two weeks late. Less than 10% were not returned or are still outstanding. In my experience, this is exceptional and strong evidence of the commitment our reviewers make to the quality of the journal. Moreover, the reviews we receive are generally judicious and often include unbelievably detailed commentaries.

CONCLUSION

This is a superb track record. Much credit must go to Bench>Press and the excellent backup provided by the BMJ Publishing Group experts. Equally, high praise is earned by our reviewers: often tough but almost always fair. And of course we are grateful to be receiving so many good papers that our reviewers are constantly challenged. Although I am truly pleased by these statistics, as I feel certain all Editorial Board members will be, we are committed to steady improvement. In particular, our targets include improving still further the scientific quality of the papers we publish, more attention to statistical issues, attracting more papers from "third nations" (in the injury prevention sense), and more evaluation reports. We are aiming to publishing six issues a year, which means even more rapid turn around time for authors and greater timeliness of some papers for readers. While striving to meet these goals we are determined to maintain the popular sections that make *Injury Prevention* so distinctive: news and notes, splinters & fragments, book reviews, and fillers. Finally, we hope to see more letters to the editor—including those that disagree with us or our authors.

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REFERENCE

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