

# Value of Peer Review in Publishing

Régis Vaillancourt

Why bother with peer review in a world where quick access to information is of paramount importance? Does peer review just delay the flow of information to the readership, or is it a way to restrict information and thus to create conformity in the medical literature (in other words, a form of censorship)? As far as I am concerned, peer review is all about quality control and the integrity of published information. But do you, as a reader of *CJHP*, know what the peer review process actually involves? What's in it for the reviewers, the authors, and the readers?

At *CJHP*, the peer review process starts with a preliminary review of each article by one of the associate editors to establish if the manuscript is of interest to our readership. After this initial assessment, usually 2 reviewers with pertinent practice experience are selected from the journal's pool of volunteer reviewers. The reviewers are given 4 weeks to go over the manuscript, from the perspective of both scientific content and presentation, and to provide constructive feedback. The comments of the assigned associate editor and the reviewers' evaluations are then sent back to the authors. The authors are asked to address the reviewers' comments before the paper is again considered for publication. To minimize bias, the identity of the reviewers and the authors is not divulged (double blinding). Once the authors have responded to the reviewers' comments, the editor reviews the document again to ensure that all of the comments have been addressed. The last step before publication is copy editing, where the focus is on style, format, and grammar. As you may have realized, the whole process is lengthy and intensive (unpublished report from *CJHP* strategic planning workshop, January 2006).

## WHAT'S IN IT FOR THE REVIEWERS?

The reasons for becoming a reviewer vary from one person to another, but data from our medical colleagues indicate that reviewing is considered part of their "civic duty" and a contribution to their

profession.<sup>1</sup> In my opinion, pharmacists are not much different in this respect. *CJHP* does not pay reviewers, yet we are able to recruit them to conduct reviews. Good reviewers are generally well known and have competing requests for their reviewing skills. I think



that being a reviewer validates a person's professional expertise and enables him or her to play a part in one of the critical aspects of health care—the dissemination of knowledge. Responses to a recent internal survey of *CJHP* contributors and readers indicated that our reviewers take their responsibility seriously. As stated by one reviewer quoted in the report of the *CJHP* strategic planning session, "Depending on the individual, it seems to take as little as three hours and as much as three business days to review an article." This is dedication.

## WHAT'S IN IT FOR THE AUTHORS?

A good review is a constructive review. It brings a different perspective to the science and structure of the manuscript submitted. This type of feedback is invaluable. By the time you, as an author, are ready to send a document for publication, you have spent hours on it, and if you're anything like me, you may be at the point of not seeing the forest for the trees or vice versa. The peer review process may appear cumbersome but it is generally well accepted by authors, who see the value of effective presentation of their work.

## WHAT'S IN IT FOR THE READERS?

Peer review, which has been part of the scientific publication process for over 300 years,<sup>1</sup> ensures quality. It

brings credibility and integrity to authors and to the journal. The credibility comes from publishing current and relevant scientific information that has been validated by clinicians within the field. The integrity comes from blinding the review process to ensure that reviewers are as free from bias as possible.

## CONCLUSIONS

So, do we need the peer review process? In my opinion, a journal cannot be credible without it. Does peer review delay publication of articles? Of course it does, but, as Molière said, “The trees that are slow to grow bear the best fruit.”

## Reference

1. Weller AC, editor. *Editorial peer review: its strengths and weaknesses*. Medford (NJ): Information Today; 2001.

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**Régis Vaillancourt**, OMM, CD, BPharm, PharmD, FCSHP, is Director of Pharmacy with the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario, Ottawa, Ontario. He is also an Associate Editor of *CJHP*.

### Address correspondence to:

Dr Régis Vaillancourt  
Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario  
401 Smyth Road  
Ottawa ON  
K1H 8L1

**e-mail:** rvaillancourt@cheo.on.ca

### Call for CJHP Reviewers

The peer review process is the cornerstone of all high-quality, well-respected publications. Mary Ensom, the new Editor of *CJHP*, invites readers to become reviewers for the Journal or to update their expertise information (for those who are already in the reviewer database). The Journal is launching a Web-based submission form. Please go to [http://www.cshp.ca/productsServices/cjhp/reviewers\\_e.asp](http://www.cshp.ca/productsServices/cjhp/reviewers_e.asp) and take a few minutes to complete your reviewer information. We extend a special invitation to individuals who can review articles submitted in French.

### Tips for Authors

At the CSHP 2006 Annual General Meeting (to be held in August at Le Centre Sheraton, Montréal, Quebec), the topic of one of the concurrent workshops will be “Silk Purses Out of Sows’ Ears: Turning your Leftover Projects and Posters into Real Publications”. During this workshop, we will review 10 simple steps in turning an abstract, project, or poster into a full-length manuscript and will discuss in detail the manuscript submission process for *CJHP*. Attendees are requested to bring to the workshop an abstract (or “leftover project or poster”) that they wish to turn into a full-length manuscript (or “real publication”).

