A workshop on impact factors and research reporting in rheumatological journals

The Excellence in Rheumatology (Eir) Institute, an international organisation, arranged its second conference in Madrid, Spain on 25-28 January 2012. The main focus of the congress, which gathered hundreds of leading rheumatologists, allied specialists and patients, was on pathophysiological, clinical and therapeutic aspects of the rheumatic diseases. The programme was full of educational lectures, workshops and schools for young researchers (www.excellence-in-rheumatology.org). Editors of top rheumatological journals such as Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases (Oxford) and Seminars in Arthritis and Rheumatism were among invited lecturers. Communication support was provided by 11 indexed journals, including Nature Reviews Rheumatology, The Journal of Rheumatology and Current Opinion in Rheumatology.

Given the importance of science writing and editing for the advancement of rheumatology practice, the conference, for the first time, arranged a workshop on issues of interest to authors, reviewers and editors. The workshop on science editing was chaired by president of the conference Prof George D. Kitas (Birmingham, UK), a leading British rheumatologist and editor of several journals. Lecturers of the workshop were council members of the European Association of Scientific Editors (EASE) and Prof Armen Yuri Gasparyan. Attendees of the workshop were clinicians and researchers from all over the world, including those from the former Soviet republics, where interest in current standards of editing and journal indexing is on the increase. Participants were familiarised with European Science Editing, which was distributed at the beginning of the workshop. Topics covered by sharp and informative speakers included uses and misuses of individual and journal impact factors as well as standards of research reporting.

Assoc Prof Armen Yuri Gasparyan presented the results of own study on the 6 index, which is closely correlated with the popular 2-year journal impact factor and is used to guide authors on the citability of journal articles. Other citation metrics were also discussed and recommendations were given on target journals for different types of articles. It was stressed that top rheumatological journals were ranked high in Web of Science and SciVerse/Scopus partly because of publishing highly citable articles on large clinical trials. Young researchers and clinicians working on small studies and case reports were advised to choose their target journals after a close look at the contents and values of impact factors.

Prof Gasparyan analysed the available Guidelines for Authors of 29 rheumatological journals indexed by Web of Science. She noticed that only 9 journals declared adherence to the research reporting guidelines of the EQUATOR Network (eg CONSORT guideline for reporting randomised trials, PRISMA for systematic reviews, STROBE for observational studies). She also noticed a flood of questions followed both presentations, resulting in discussion of a range of topics. Prof Marc Hochberg, editor in chief of Seminars in Arthritis and Rheumatism, asked questions on the role of peer review, on the frequent refusals by eminent rheumatologists to review papers and on authors’ preferred reviewers. Prof George D. Kitas reaffirmed that many leading editors lack time for peer review and are not always available for comprehensive and rigorous review. Armen Yuri Gasparyan went on to suggest setting rules for peer review and reviewers’ tasks tailored to the needs of each journal.

A number of other editing issues were discussed within the frames of the official sessions and informal meetings with experts. Prof Sherine E. Gabrielle (Mayo Clinic, Rochester, USA), co-editor of the Kelley’s Textbook of Rheumatology, shared her experiences in reviewing and updating content of this must-read source, which constantly expands to cover many hot topics.

Conference participants positively evaluated the workshop on science editing and suggested that it be repeated at future congresses on a regular basis to meet the growing research and publishing needs of rheumatologists from all over the world. The Journal of Rheumatology, Seminars in Arthritis and Rheumatism, Gasparyan went on to suggest setting rules for peer review and reviewers’ tasks tailored to the needs of each journal.

One or two subjects

Yaneendra Joshi asked for views on whether the subject in the following sentence takes a singular or plural verb ‘the classification and identification of XYZ [is/are] based mainly on morphological characters’. Most respondents thought there were two subjects and favoured the plural. John Taylor mulled over the possibility that classification and identification were being used jointly as one criteria, when the singular would be correct. However he thought the plural would be correct if the organisms are to be classified firstly according to their structure and secondly according to their identification.

The sentence sounded strange in any event to Mary Ellen Kerans who suggested a re-write: ‘YZX is identified and classified based on morphological characteristics/morphological features.’ This view was echoed by Peter Hovenkamp who believed the solution might be to delete either classification or identification because one implies or excludes the other.

Francoise Salager-Meyer compared ‘classification and identification’ as two subjects with collective nouns, which she saw as singular subjects. She gave ‘the council is tasked with’ as an example of a collective noun (council) taking a singular verb. Mariia Craig considered that in this example Americans would use ‘is’ and the British ‘are’. Elisabeth Heseltine went a step further and quoted Fowler as an authority for British English allowing either the singular or plural and American English favouring the singular. The argument in my (British English) experience is that if the collective noun (council, majority, public or whatever) acts as a single unit, as the council does in Francois’s example because all members of the council think the same way, it takes the singular but if the council were to disagree they would not be acting as a single unit and therefore take a plural noun, i.e. the council are not unanimous in their decision. Stuart Handysides saw things differently. He thought the collective noun is the plural verb because it must have the opportunity of being other than agreed.

Which version is the original?

The Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education has changed its criteria for evaluating those scientific journals that do not have an impact factor. Marcin was concerned that the change threatens to exclude many good foreign journals as publication venues for Polish authors. The Ministry has proclaimed that to be evaluated every issue must include a statement as to whether the original version, defined as the one which was published first, is online or in print. Angela Turner had not heard of this requirement but each article in her journal, Animal Behaviour published by Elsevier, gives the online version first but adds that as it is usual for journals to publish articles online first it would be pointless to include a statement about whether articles appeared in print or online first. Marcin agreed but this was not the Ministry’s decision. Liz Wager raised the point of which version was considered the definitive ‘publication of record’. She had noticed that there was considerable variation in what publishers post online. Some post the accepted version before it has been copyedited or typeset, others post the version after copyediting but before typesetting, others after these procedures but before the proof is corrected and yet others post the corrected proof, i.e. the print version without page numbers or the print version with page numbers. Some, like the BMJ, post a longer version online than in print and consider the online version the definitive version. She added that CrossMark is about to launch CrossMark which will identify the definitive and latest version of the article (http://www.crossref.org/crossmark/index.html) and a speaker will be explaining this at the EASE conference in Tallinn this year.

Do journals consider long abstracts online prior publication?

Conference abstracts used to be short and published in a booklet given to participants at the conference but there is an increasing trend to put them online where they can be freely accessed. Angela received an email from a journal editor where the substantive part of the article was already online in the form of an abstract that contained considerable detail and gave the main statistical results. People who replied to the question thought it was not prior publication because it was an abstract and was published in the context of conference proceedings. Liz Wager quoted the ICMJE guidelines (http://www.icmje.org/publishing/overlap.html) which state that journals can consider papers presented at a scientific meeting that have not been published in full for publication. She also referred to BioMed Central’s statement that manuscripts resulting from abstracts presented at meetings or published as part of a conference represent a formal advance to the citable scientific record and should therefore be considered for peer review by the journal. Only if the abstract had already been reviewed by the meeting committee http://www.biomedcentral.com/about/duplicatepublication

But surely the question here is when does an abstract cease to be an abstract and become a full publication that
can be considered a prior publication. Journals should decide whether to consider a manuscript, of which substantial parts are already public, for publication on a case-to-case basis taking account of their readers’ interest in the topic and the space available in the journal.

We invite you to rewrite your article and publish it in our journal

What would you make of an invitation to write an article based on one you had already published but 80% different from the published article? Marcin Kozak was astonished when he received such an invitation from a journal he did not know. “I was surprised that the journal did not know what I was doing in the field,” as he saw it they were asking him to publish the same material as had already been published. He wondered if others had received such invitations. Tom Lang suspected the purpose of the invitation was to get enough citations to become indexed. Marcin doubted this notion because it was a new journal that only published 6 papers in 2011, so was unlikely to get indexed any time soon; rather he thought it was desperate for authors as it was one of very many new open-access journals. Chris Sterken did not see this as an open-access only practice as he had also received such invitations from editors of for-profit publishers. The true motive behind the invitation would be revealed Sylwia Ufnalska suspected if Marcin suggested that they reprint the original paper (with permission from the copyright holder).

An interesting blog

Kersti Wagstaff directed forum participants to Anna Sharman’s blog, http://sharmanedit.wordpress.com/, which includes postings on dangerous formatting errors, choosing a journal for your manuscript, The Research Works Act, open access and publisher boycotts. It’s a really worthwhile blog.

The wrong way to measure scientific performance

Leiden University in the Netherlands recently published its list of most-cited entities in the world (www.leidenranking.com). The listing is based on measurements of scientific performance. Ed Hull questioned the relevance and credibility of such a list as well as the consequences of it and asked the forum for views. One of the main criteria Leiden University uses to assess performance is the number of articles published in high impact factor journals. With the Dutch researcher Diederik Stapel who faked research data in at least 30 scientific papers in mind, Pat French wondered if account had been taken of retracted papers that had been cited by others. Eric Lefebvre from France said that the university’s name was buried in the middle of the address. As Thomson Reuters Web of Science database only takes account of the first two words of the address, French universities and research centres are underestimated because up to 40% of their publications were missed. Sylwia Ufnalska said that the addresses of Polish universities also hardly ever had the university name as the first two words. Pointing to the following address given on an American paper she saw this as a general problem: Laboratory for Developmental Studies, Department of Psychology, Harvard University Cambridge, MA, USA.

Tom Lang felt the problem was that, like others, Leiden was counting what was countable rather than considering factors that could not be counted but were more important. Universities are information-generating institutions but as information is impossible to measure he thought the consumers of the information were what needed to be measured. Marge Berer agreed and said in her field of reproductive health she was seeing an epidemic of demand for measurement of things that could be measured quantitatively and rejection of things that could not. She suggested that the journal fund its ulterior motive was to get enough citations to become indexed. Marcin doubted this notion because it was a new journal that only published 6 papers in 2011, so was unlikely to get indexed any time soon; rather he thought it was desperate for authors as it was one of very many new open-access journals. Chris Sterken did not see this as an open-access only practice as he had also received such invitations from editors of for-profit publishers. The true motive behind the invitation would be revealed Sylwia Ufnalska suspected if Marcin suggested that they reprint the original paper (with permission from the copyright holder).

Buyer beware it might be open access elsewhere

Karen Shashok complained that NewsRx was charging $3 for access to an article which she had published open access in BMC Medical Research Methodology. Chris Sterken thought that if she had published it with a Creative Commons Licence she would still have the copyright and NewsRx could have breached her copyright. Pippa Smith by contrast mentioned that the licence allows reuse for commercial gain. However, she had heard that some larger publishers were investigating this entity because they were also offering copyright-protected works. Mary Ellen Kerans saw an opportunity to read the original article open access. Karen’s analysis of the Creative Commons license that applies showed that commercial reuse is allowed but that NewsRx may have violated her moral right, as copyright holder, to have her name credited. Marge Berer agreed and said in her field of reproductive health she was seeing an epidemic of demand for measurement of things that could be measured quantitatively and rejection of things that could not.

The Cochrane Summaries project

http://summaries.cochrane.org

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The Cochrane Summaries project is to provide readily accessible information from Cochrane Reviews in shorter summaries that can be quickly consulted to verify health claims. The Cochrane summaries website was developed to improve access to both the summaries and also to provide other useful background information.

Advanced search technology

The site is powered by a Google-type search engine, which is aided by a suggestive, ‘did you mean?’ feature to improve the accuracy of your search. Search keywords are automatically linked to metadata that correlate to specific health topics in the database. The summaries can be viewed with optimal presentation on a variety of internet-friendly devices, including handhelds.

Browse by health topic

For a broader search of the database, the website features additional browse options by demographic characteristics, or any of The Cochrane Library online in periodic to account for new evidence and are published on The Cochrane Library (www.thecochranelibrary.com).

This site I like

Cochrane Summaries: a new tool to verify medical conclusions about healthcare interventions

(http://summaries.cochrane.org)

Keeping up-to-date with the latest research is a daunting task for health professionals. It is even more challenging for scientific editors, expected to cover a wide array of health topics. A comprehensive search of the literature is beyond the km of the best journal editors, as this would require significant financial support. A new tool to verify medical conclusions about healthcare interventions has been designed, with the aim to support editors’ efforts to publish unique perspectives.

Catherine McIlwain

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The Cochrane Summaries website was developed by Chris Mavergame, Martin Janczyk, Lorne Becker and Catherine McIlwain.

The Cochrane Summaries website has received global attention. This reached a pinnacle when The Cochrane Collaboration was awarded the runner-up trophy for the best public website by the Plain English Campaign. Each year, a handful of the best (and worst) examples of plain language are publicly honoured by The Plain English Campaign. The Campaign reviews documents and websites to ensure that public information is presented in a clear fashion. Websites are judged for their content, design and layout. A spokesperson for the Campaign indicated that Cochrane Summaries earned the 2011 runner-up award because of its unique ability to use plain language summaries to communicate the results of medical research.

Continuous growth

Cochrane Summaries is continuing to improve, from refining the details of which content should appear in the summaries to developing further resources for the website.

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