

# Could you be a peer reviewer?

Phil Wiffen

Most authors and readers of scientific papers agree that peer review is an important part of the publishing process. However, getting peer reviewers is an increasing challenge for many journals including *European Journal of Hospital Pharmacy (EJHP)*. In an editorial around 4 years ago, I mentioned that we frequently contact seven or more potential reviewers in order to obtain peer review reports. Since then, things have worsened, and now it is not uncommon to approach up to 15 potential reviewers in order to obtain sufficient reports. As an editorial team, we are incredibly grateful for those who undertake peer review for us, many of whom submit high-quality reports. However, we do need more peer reviewers so this is a call to sign up!

For this journal, peer review is a key stage in the consideration of a paper submitted for publication. While the editorial team have a wide experience across hospital pharmacy, they cannot be experts on every aspect and so external peer review is important. That said not all papers make it to peer review if the editorial team feel that the paper is unsuitable for publication for a number of reasons that include: out of scope of the journal, poor science—often due to conclusions being based on small numbers, report of a local issue without wider application or

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poor quality composition. The main aims of peer review are to provide feedback to the editor by commenting on the strengths and weaknesses of the paper being considered. The editor does not need a comment on whether the paper is suitable for publication, but this is sometimes provided. The second aim is to feedback to authors to encourage them to improve the manuscript. The second aim is likely to be the longest part of the report as it will comment on different parts of paper with the aim of improving the scientific quality in a professional and respectful way. The length of the report will vary according to the quality of the paper. Some may require an extensive report, while others may be dealt with by brief comments if it is very good (or very bad). There are ethical considerations for reviewers that will be apparent to most readers. Do not review a paper written by a colleague or a friend, do declare any conflicts of interest (especially if you are working on a similar publication) and keep all the details of the paper confidential.

Most authors value such feedback but may not always agree with it. Also, it is possible that several peer reviewers may suggest incompatible requests. We ask that authors address such comments but retain the right to disagree and say why. Usually one revision is sufficient, but a proportion of papers may be sent to the author for further revisions and occasionally be sent for further review.

Peer review can be time consuming but is of value to editors and authors and should lead to better quality publications though the evidence for that is sparse. However, the reviewing process can be beneficial for potential researchers and authors and will highlight good and bad points for future work. While we appreciate the efforts of experienced reviewers, we are also looking to recruit junior pharmacists who are willing to grow into the role. Remember that 'peer' is a key part of peer review, and we are receiving an increasing number of papers from first-time authors. At its basic, we are looking for reassurance that a paper is relevant, trustworthy and an interesting read.

In view of this, I am asking if you would consider acting in this capacity. Teaching resources are available on the web, and we do run sessions at congress from time to time. If you have colleagues who are involved in peer review, then ask them to mentor you and you could offer to help with their next suitable paper. There is an opportunity to sign up at the *EJHP* stand in the exhibition hall, so call by or send an email to the editor in chief. Looks good on your CV as well!

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