Guiding authors

Phil Wiffen

This journal in line with many others provides guidance for prospective authors designed to steer the preparation of papers for submission and consideration for publication.1 Failure to follow the guidance is one of the most common reasons for rejection, so this editorial is to highlight their importance. We aim to give advice on the preparation of different types of articles, including original articles, short reports, case reports and letters, and we provide a template for case reports. At a recent editors board held at the Congress, we spent some time discussing the reporting of systematic reviews using the PRISMA tool (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses).

Reporting tools have grown up over recent years out of the evidence-based medicine movement as an attempt to improve the reports and therefore the utility of various study types. These have been largely adopted as policy by most major clinical journals. The first of these was for randomised controlled trials (RCTs). This is known by the acronym CONSORT (Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials) and recognises the frequent frustration of those preparing systematic reviews in terms of extracting data from RCTs for meta-analysis. This led on to a raft of reporting guidelines (over 400 at the last count). These can all be found on the EQUATOR (Enhancing the QUAlity and Transparency Of Health Research) network web page.2 I am personally not convinced of the need for so many but would encourage the use of PRISMA and CONSORT.

Potential authors of systematic reviews are encouraged to download the PRISMA guidance, and although this is a long document there are two important sections (also available separately on the website)2 that need to be observed. These are the PRISMA flow diagram, which sets out the way in which included studies were selected. More important is the PRISMA checklist, which details what elements should be included in the report. They cover all sections including the abstract, methods, results, discussion and funding. We have noted a trend in submissions to this journal where authors state they have followed PRISMA guidance and include a flow chart, but many of the elements in the checklist are missing.

Potential authors are also reminded of the limit set on tables and/or figures, set at a maximum of six. We have a facility to undertake this task for a fee, and I encourage authors to use these when they think it is necessary.

I am aware of the work involved in preparing a paper for submission, and I hope that by raising these issues authors will be helped and have a smoother ride through to a successful publication.

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