

SPEEDY PEER REVIEW AND REDUCING PUBLICATION TIME

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Ever since we started the Online edition of Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences (www.pjms.com.pk) in 2001, there has been manifold increase in the number of manuscripts received from overseas in particular.¹ As such we had to increase the number of manuscripts being included in each issue as well as speeding up the peer review process. However, even then there has been delay in publication of the approved manuscripts. In order to reduce this publication time, we have decided to publish an additional issue that is why this current issue April-June 2007 (Part-I) was planned while the Part-II of April-June 2007 will be published by the end of June 2007. We also plan to publish another additional issue in later part of this year again with the main objective to reduce the publication time. However, we cannot change the frequency of publication from quarterly to bimonthly because financial constraints do not permit us to do so and it may not be sustainable in the long run.

Efforts are also being made to speed up the peer review process but so far we have been partially successful. Finding good reviewers is an uphill task but our efforts continue to enlist more and more reviewers from overseas in our Reviewers data base and we are hopeful that within next few months we will be able to make good headway.

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Editors of peer reviewed medical journals published from the developing third world countries are faced with many problems and finding good reviewers is one of them.² A detailed analysis will reveal that if the authors are careful, read and follow instructions to the authors carefully and refrain from submitting incomplete manuscripts, it will reduce lot of processing time during the peer review. It has also been observed that many authors intentionally indulge in simultaneous submission to more than one journal at the same time and some even do that even after having given a written undertaking that the manuscript is being exclusively submitted to that particular journal. They indulge in such unethical practices just to maximize their chances of early publication. Hence, whenever they get an acceptance from one journal, then they try to withdraw it from the other journals but little do they realize that how much precious time of the editors and reviewers they waste. One can understand their eagerness for early publication but they must realize that peer review takes some time and they have to show some patience. There is no short cut since the Editors are keen to maintain quality and standard of the manuscripts accepted for publication and every effort is made to ensure early publication. At times the authors do not respond to queries, do not return the manuscript after proof reading in time or delay in arranging publication charges. In case the authors are careful and respond immediately, much of the problems can be resolved which result in delayed processing and publication.

Simultaneous submission and duplication publication is a menace which is very much prevalent every where. We have tried to check

this at Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences. During the last four years we detected five cases of simultaneous submission to more than one journal and duplicate publication. After necessary investigations the authors of these manuscripts along with their co-authors were barred from submitting manuscripts in future. This information was also conveyed to their institution head and relevant official bodies like Pakistan Medical & Dental Council, the Higher Education Commission as well as other medical journals being published from Pakistan.³ In one case the author asked for his manuscript to be withdrawn when it was already finalized and posted in Online edition which is usually uploaded about four to six weeks prior to the availability of printed copy of the journal. Since it was not possible, hence the request was refused. We had to drop three articles from the current issue after finalization because despite repeated reminders the authors neither communicated any corrections to their manuscript nor arranged for publication charges. In future as a policy it has been decided that the authors will be required to pay publication charges within three weeks time once an acceptance letter is issued and no manuscript will be processed further unless the publication charges have been arranged. Another author on repeated reminders to return manuscript after proof reading disclosed that his assistant had already submitted this manuscript to another journal without his knowledge and it has already been published. Hence this manuscript was also dropped from this

issue and both the author and his co-author have been banned from further submitting their manuscripts for publication. We had to take these unpleasant decisions to avoid duplicate publications. Annals of Saudi Medicine as a policy have also put a five year ban on submission of manuscripts from such authors.⁴

While we are keen to speed up the peer review process and reduce the publication time as far as possible, we cannot allow such authors who indulge in unethical practices to go unnoticed and un-punished. The authors must realize that it is not in their interest in the long run. There is a need for enforcing such a policy of putting a ban for further submission from such authors by all the medical journals. If this policy is strictly enforced, it will help to eliminate the menace of duplicate publication and simultaneous submission to more than one journal. Authors need to be reminded time and again to abide by the publication ethics and this issue needs to be discussed and emphasized at every available academic forum.

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