

Evidence-Based Editing: Promotion of Editorial Research

Moderators:

Ana Marusic

Croatian Medical Journal
Zagreb, Croatia

Margaret A Winker

JAMA
Chicago, Illinois

Speakers:

Christopher Surridge

PLoS One
Cambridge, United Kingdom

Floyd Webster Rudmin

Journal of Economic Psychology
Tromsø, Norway

Amy Brand

CrossRef
Lynnfield, Massachusetts

James Scott

Obstetrics & Gynecology
Salt Lake City, Utah

Bruce D Rosenblum

Inera Inc
Newton, Massachusetts

Reporter:

Liz Wager

Sideview
Princes Risborough, United Kingdom

For most editors, journalology has low priority, so research gets done in editors' "spare time", according to CSE President Ana Marusic. This session aimed to address the issue, focusing on what editors can do about publication misconduct. James Scott, of *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, noted that there is no proven method to detect research fraud, but experienced editors can often sense that a paper is bad. In such cases, an editor may seek extra consultation or may ask the author for the raw data,

but journals should have an agreed-on process for handling suspect papers because allegations of misconduct can have serious consequences.

Floyd Webster Rudmin, a researcher and editor, believes that journals should cut their decision-making times. He said that some journals take over a year to accept papers. In one case, it took 5 years for a journal to publish one of his papers. He also suggested that editors pay more attention to the many conflicts of interest that occur in science publishing, such as when reviewers suggest citation of their own papers and editors select reviewers having conflicts of interest. He noted that many journals lack processes for authors to complain about editorial practices and that few academic associations cover publication ethics in their codes of conduct.

Margaret Winker posed the question, "Is editorial review and decision-making broken?" She reminded the audience that most "evidence" on editorial processes is of a low scientific standard and founded mainly on expert opinion rather than real research. Many journals do things in a particular way because they've always done them that way. When editors focus their attention on issues, they may uncover a worrying scale of problems. For example, journals that have investigated inappropriate manipulation of photographs have found evidence of it in around 25% of accepted papers. There is also considerable evidence of duplicate publication in all disciplines. Studies in several countries have shown that students do not regard plagiarism as a particularly serious offense, and it might be more common than editors believe. Editors use a variety of resources to learn about issues—such as CSE, the Committee on Publication Ethics, and the World Association of Medical Editors—but there is little information on the extent of publication misconduct.

Christopher Surridge believes that jour-

nals overload peer review (and reviewers) with multiple functions. Editors expect peer review to validate science, select the best articles for a journal, and improve submissions. Those functions require different reviewer characteristics and require processes to be applied well, and Surridge suggested that expecting reviewers to perform all the functions was the equivalent of asking them to exchange their heads.

If reviewers are fallible, perhaps technology can help. Bruce D Rosenblum, of Inera, described how software that automatically links references to databases, such as MEDLINE, not only provides benefits for reviewers and readers but may improve citation accuracy. Bibliographic databases can be used to check the originality of submissions, but existing antiplagiarism software searches only publicly accessible text. However, Amy Brand described an initiative that is being pilot-tested. The new system (called CrossCheck) uses the CrossRef database, which was originally designed to provide links among journal articles and contains about 26 million articles from scholarly journals. The database could be used for "text fingerprinting", which can alert editors to duplicate publications and plagiarism by comparing submissions with publications that are in the database. Future developments could include linking electronic submission systems so that editors could check for similarities not only with published work but with papers being considered by other journals.

Even if computers can help editors to detect misconduct and thus lighten their workload, it probably will be a long time before editors have enough spare hours to do the research necessary for editing to become truly "evidence-based". As Marusic has noted, this should have high priority in CSE. 