

## Why Should Editors Do Research?

*Moderator:*

**Christine Laine**

*Annals of Internal Medicine*  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

*Speakers:*

**Drummond Rennie**

*Journal of the American Medical Association*  
San Francisco, California

**Ana Marusic**

*Croatian Medical Journal*  
Zagreb, Croatia

**Daniel Kulp**

*American Physical Society*  
Ridge, New York

*Reporter:*

**Roma Subramanian**

*Texas A&M University*  
College Station, Texas

From investigating the current state of the peer-review system to understanding the role of journal editors as educators in local academic communities, the speakers in this session offered different perspectives on the need for editors to do research.

The first speaker, Drummond Rennie, deputy editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and originator and director of the International Congresses on Peer Review and Biomedical Publication, described the congresses as the first attempt to stimulate and present research on the editorial process. He provided a brief overview of the research topics discussed at the congresses, including publication bias, blinded reviewing, and authorship.

Rennie noted that peer review is usually a “secret, unaccountable, and unstandardized process [that] gives spurious authority to reviewers”. He commented on the relatively puny amount of research that has been conducted thus far on the editorial process and stressed the need to investigate the cognitive processes involved in peer review and editorial decision making.

Answering the question posed by this session’s title, the second speaker, Ana Marusic, coeditor of the *Croatian Medical Journal (CMJ)*, said that one reason that editors should do research is to “know” their journals. She described studies that she was involved in to understand various aspects of the *CMJ*, such as submission trends and authorship. She explained how the inclusion of the *CMJ* in international bibliographic databases, such as MEDLINE, resulted in an increase in the number of annual submissions to the journal and an increase in the number of original articles and non-Croatian manuscripts submitted. She noted that as submissions increased, the acceptance rate decreased.

Topics of authorship studies that Marusic described included the reliability of “contribution disclosure forms” used by medical journals to confirm authorship, the influence of the format of such forms on deserved authorship, and perceptions of authorship criteria by graduate medical students, graduate students, doctors, and medical teachers. The findings of the studies indicated that self-reported information cannot be used satisfactorily to decide who deserves authorship.

Marusic concluded by discussing research on the role of the editor as an educator. She described a study in which 47 journal

authors who were tutored in “scientific writing and data presentation” by the editors of the *CMJ* were compared with 47 of their academic peers who did not receive tutoring. The 47 tutored authors were selected, on the basis of their willingness to participate in the study, from a total of 65 authors who accepted a tutoring invitation offered by *CMJ* editors during the 1991–1995 war years in Croatia. The untutored “academic peers” were selected from a pool of 94 colleagues identified by the 47 tutored authors. The tutored authors published more articles in MEDLINE-indexed journals, had more citations of their articles, and achieved greater “academic advancements” than their untutored peers.

In keeping with the theme of the need for editors to do research to understand their journals, the last speaker, Daniel Kulp, editorial director of the American Physical Society (APS), presented data from a “self-examination” of APS and its nine physics journals. Topics discussed included tracking the volume of monthly submissions to the journals, examining the geographic origins of manuscripts submitted, analyzing the length of time from manuscript submission to acceptance, and monitoring visitor traffic on the APS Web site to obtain information on readership. Kulp also discussed the use of different types of surveys to obtain information on subscribers. 