Editorial

J Nepal Health Res Counc 2018 Oct-Dec;16(41):I-II

DOI https://doi.org/10.33314/jnhrc.1872

Peer Review for Scientific Journals: Challenges and Way Forward

Ganesh Dangal,[1] Pawan Kumar Hamal,[1] Ojash Dangal[2]

[1]Journal of Nepal Health Research Council, Ramshah Path, Kathmandu, [2]KIST Medical College, Lalitpur, Nepal.

Peer review is basically a systematic scrutiny of a scientific work; done by experts in the field. It gives validity and authenticity to the findings from a research work that gets published in a peer reviewed journal or presented in a conference. It is also done for proposals submitted for a grant or thesis. Only peer-reviewed work is counted as a part of quality scientific literature and valued by academia and institutions for career ladder of a faculty.[1] Peer review is considered as the biggest hurdle in the publication process; and is crucial and critical to any research paper. A credible peer review makes a paper suitable for publication either by authenticating or improving the work done by the researchers and only the quality work deserves publication in a scientific journal. In today's world, prior to publication, any manuscript must pass the ordeal of the "peer review" and it definitely improves the quality of the published paper.[2] There are variations in the existing peer review system such as single blind to double blind review, open review with more transparency and in-house or internal review and external review as part of pre-publication peer review. There can also be post-publication peer review where a paper is scrutinized and commented on by experts after it is published. However, post-publication review is a useful supplement to formal peer review, rather than a replacement for it. Peer review aims to provide the editors with an expert opinion about the quality of the manuscript under consideration, and it should also supply authors with constructive feedback to improve the manuscript so that it will be acceptable for publication.

There are some set golden rules and the peer- review good practice checklist[3] that has to be followed by a robust peer-reviewed journal. The originality of the research, the importance of the questions addressed, the appropriateness of the techniques or methods used, the quality and reliability of the data and significance of the conclusions are the most important criteria for critically reviewing the research manuscript. Peer-reviewers are content experts but they are overworked, rarely paid for it and at times underprepared and inconsistent; often with no formal training to do peer-review. Besides assessing the title, abstract, language of the manuscript and references, reviewers assess the scientific quality of the research work and paper. Papers can go through several rounds of peer review. Submissions are rejected outright, asked for minor or major revisions or rarely accepted based on the quality of research and the research paper under consideration. Lack of competent and qualified pool of reviewers, failure to meet deadlines given to reviewers to complete manuscript evaluation, problem of retainment of reviewers because of lack of recognition and motivation, lack of clear guidelines for the reviewers, delay in the review process due to its slowness, ineffective reviews and the trivial comments resulting in a poor review are the major problems or challenges for peer review system we have at present.[4] These challenges have to be overcomed and addressed efficiently to improve the science at local, regional and international arena. Invaluable guidance from seniors, regular specific trainings, acquiring skills to critically appraise research papers, statistical literacy are some strategies to be better peer reviewers; in addition to incentives to the reviewers and more formal recognition for their review work.

Science is suffering as there are numerous big problems in the current review process. However, we need to discuss this openly so that we become better equipped to face and solve the challenges and struggles with peer review. Peer review is still better than other alternatives and will always be a valuable, crucial and decisive part of the publishing process for ensuring quality scientific deliberation in spite of the challenges and problems associated with it. Committed editors will continue to do their best to overcome the challenges with peer review and maintain research integrity. Scholars also need to value the peer review process and bear with its slowness and questionable efficiency. We also need to understand clearly that there is a need to reform the current journal publication process and system.

Correspondence: Prof Dr Ganesh Dangal, Editor-In-Chief, Nepal Health Research Council, Ramshah Path, Kathmandu, Nepal. Email: ganesh.dangal@gmail.com, Phone: +977-9851055036.

REFERENCES

1. Hamal PK, Dangal G. Peer Review Initiatives in Nepal. J Nepal Health Res Counc. 2018;16(40):I. [Link]
2. Voice of Young Science. Peer Review: the nuts and bolts. London: Sense about Science; 2012. [Link]
3. Hames I, editor. Peer Review and Manuscript Management in Scientific Journals: Guidelines for Good Practice. USA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc; 2007. [Link]
4. eContent Pro International. A Closer Look at the Common Challenges in Peer Review. USA: eContent Pro; 2017. [Link]