

■ GUEST EDITORIAL

Are we ready for a new relationship between academicians, academia, and publishing houses?

Recent decades have seen a steady and significant growth in both the number of articles and the number of discrete journals in the medical field. On top of other publication avenues such as open access, online, shared data, and meeting synopses, this is adding up to an already crowded milieu.

Dissemination of scientific findings via peer-reviewed journals, for scrutiny by colleagues, is essential in order to allow further independent validation of these findings (or conversely to rebuff). Hence, these publications depend on a thorough review process by fellow researchers and clinicians. This system has been around for many years and has allowed for the advancement of science and medicine. However, it is not without flaws: For a start, some reviewers may be reluctant to decline a call for review by a journal, so as not to risk their standing with the journal when they submit their own paper for review. With the academic promotion system being based largely on the number of publications and the journals' quality, researchers might sometimes feel that refusal to review may have an impact on their academic career.

So what can be done to improve the current situation? I believe that an overhaul of the existing system is timely and needed. This will require a multipronged approach: From the journals' end, a credit system in the form of a structured "reviewer board" could be helpful to better acknowledge the time and intellectual input made by these individuals. Furthermore, a compensatory mechanism should be set out, perhaps in the form of free subscription or free access.

From the other end, academic institutions need to consider revising their promotion criteria by putting much greater emphasis on the publication quality rather than sheer numbers. This could have the benefit of reducing the number or improving the quality of the manuscripts published in the hundreds of online journals that have appeared in recent years.

A change cannot take place over night, and it can also not happen unless all the involved parties consent to these changes. As always, there will be some that will gladly embrace such changes (and some journals are already taking steps in this direction), while others will rather keep the "old order." I believe that a dialog will be required to allow a bipartisan plan for a smooth and rapid transition.

Such revision of the current system is likely to pave the way for new and improved relationships between authors, publishers, and academic institutions. In the end, it may improve the data published for the benefit of science, dentistry, and medicine.



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