

Parallel Sessions A
A3 – Questioning Scholarly Communications

Thursday, September 19, Room D, 10.30

Peer Review - a Proposal for Change

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Despite the well recognised problems of the peer review system(1), the results of informed discussion with scientists suggest that, despite all its faults, peer review is the only workable system currently on offer for the quality control of journal articles.

Developments during the past 20 years, notably in the field of medicine, have led to two distinct tiers of peer review – review at the pre-publication stage and ‘end-reader’ review (critical appraisal) post-publication. Pre-publication peer review is a long established system with no agreed standards, protocols or methodologies and reviewers receive no formal training. In contrast, post-publication critical appraisal is based on formalised methods, developed and agreed on a world-wide basis(2).

It is proposed that lessons from the formalised post-publication review processes should be translated to the pre-publication stage. The implications of such a change would include improvements in advice to peer reviewers and, thus, to the quality of published material. Time and effort invested at this stage should lead to huge benefits in terms of the necessary investment in time by individual readers of journals with cost, efficiency and effectiveness gains. Specific ‘evidence-based’ recommendations for consideration by journal editors will be presented in this paper.

1) “Peer review, a legacy system of unpaid experts passing judgment on each other’s work, is vulnerable to human weaknesses such as arrogance, envy and naked ambition” (Tonks A. Guarded words Guardian 4 October 2000)

(2) See for example: Guyatt G, Rennie D (eds.) Users’ guides to the medical literature. Essentials of evidence-based practice. Chicago: American Medical Association Press, 2002 (stet).