

Medical Education

Editorial policy statement

The journal's mission statement

Medical Education is an international, peer-reviewed, journal with distribution to readers in more than 80 countries. The journal seeks to enhance its position as the pre-eminent journal in the field of education for health care professionals and aims to publish material of the highest quality reflecting world wide or provocative issues and perspectives. The contents will be of interest to learners, teachers and researchers, and, potentially, have a significant impact on scholarship in medical education and, ultimately, on the quality of health care. The journal welcomes papers on any aspect of medical education. The predominant emphasis in *Medical Education* is on work related to the education of doctors and medical students and papers on interprofessional education are welcomed.

Ethical standards

Medical Education's policy on ethical standards is based on the 'Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals', a document issued by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. The complete document is published in *Medical Education* 1999; 33: 66-78 and can be viewed at <http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/journals/med>. In addition, *Medical Education* is also in active debate with other leading journals concerning ethical standards, and conforms to current standards of practice recommended by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and the European Association of Science Editors (EASE).

The views expressed in *Medical Education* are not necessarily those of its parent Association, ASME, nor of its publisher, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, which accord complete editorial freedom to the Editor in Chief and Editorial Team.

Appeals

The Editor in Chief always replies to authors who query or appeal decisions concerning publication of their manuscripts. Each case is considered individually and, where appropriate, the Editor in Chief discusses the case with the Deputy/Associate Editor concerned before replying.

However, authors should remember that the Editor in Chief bears many factors in mind when deciding a paper's priority for publication. These include such matters as the editorial direction of the journal, the relevance of the paper to the general readership of the journal and its importance to an international audience. Referees make judgements on the paper's originality, academic rigour and importance but it is not their role to make summative judgements on publication matters. The Editor in Chief is not only at liberty, but has a duty to put the interests of the journal's readership and the academic community at large before those of any individual author. On these matters, therefore, the Editor in Chief's decision is usually final.

Authors who wish to appeal a decision should send a clearly-worded letter to the Editor in Chief explaining why they believe that the journal should continue to consider their paper. It is not enough simply to say that the reviews were positive. A

case needs to be made for the academic significance of the paper, or information given about why negative reviews should have been treated with more caution. Suggestions may be made about how the authors plan to improve their paper. Where authors are able to make a good case, the Editor in Chief will be happy to seek further review of the paper.

Outright rejection

All manuscripts are read by at least one internal reviewer. Following that initial review, just over half of all manuscripts submitted to *Medical Education* in 2002 were sent to external review but 27% were rejected outright.

We have introduced a checklist in order to provide a small amount of feedback to authors whose papers are rejected outright, but we do not have the resources to supply individual responses to all rejected authors. We therefore are unable to enter into correspondence with authors requesting further details of our reasons for rejection.

Allegations of author misconduct

Where apparent author misconduct is reported to the Editor in Chief, in the first instance the Editor in Chief will carry out appropriate investigations. If confirmed, the Editor in Chief will report the allegation to the author concerned and ask for an explanation. If the reply is unsatisfactory or further investigation is indicated, the Editor in Chief may seek further advice and information from other parties, protecting the identity of the author where possible. These other parties may include members of the journal's editorial executive, publisher's lawyers, and the Chairs of ASME and/or COPE, particularly in the case of serious allegations such as scientific fraud.

If misconduct is proved, the Editor in Chief may report the incident to the author's institution and, where necessary, arrange for a retraction to be published in the Journal. In accordance with COPE Guidelines, serious incidents will be reported to the individual's Head of Department/institution/relevant professional body.

Allegations of editorial misconduct

Should such an allegation arise, it will be referred to the Chair of the Editorial Board and to the journal's Joint Board of Management for independent investigation.

Authorship and contributorship

A brief description of authorship is given in the 'Uniform Guidelines for Biomedical Journals (Vancouver Group Guidelines 2001). *Medical Education* bases its own definition of authorship on these guidelines, which state that authorship may be attributed if all of the following three conditions are met:

- 1) substantial contributions to conception and design, or acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data;
- 2) drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content; and
- 3) final approval of the version to be published.

Single tasks such as the acquisition of funding, the collation of data, general supervision of the research group or copy editing, do not by themselves justify

authorship. Those who have contributed to the paper in these or similar ways, but who do not meet all three authorship requirements, should be listed separately as Contributors and their contributions outlined.

Those whose participation in the paper was restricted to basic clerical tasks such as typing, or whose contribution was in a supporting role such as the loan of facilities or provision of funding should be listed in the Acknowledgements section.

One author must agree to be the corresponding author. One author, not necessarily the corresponding author must agree to be the guarantor for the paper. The order in which the names of the authors appear is a matter for the authors themselves.

Authors' editors and translators

Medical Education welcomes papers by authors from countries all over the world. In 2002, papers were received from authors giving addresses in 51 different countries worldwide. Around three-fifths of all papers published by the journal originate from countries outside the UK. We never reject a paper just because the English in which it is written is not fluent, but we do not have the resources to offer extensive editing facilities to authors who have difficulties with written English. We therefore encourage authors whose first language is not English, before they submit their paper to *Medical Education* to seek the services of a professional translation service, or to seek the advice of a colleague who is familiar with preparing English-language manuscripts for publication. Such contributors should always be acknowledged in the Contributors section and the part they have played in preparing the manuscript should be outlined.

Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest exists when professional judgement concerning a primary interest (such as patients' welfare or the validity of research) may be influenced by secondary interests (personal matters such as financial gain, personal relationships or professional rivalry). All parties involved in the writing, assessment and selection of papers for publication – authors, reviewers and editors – are required to make a clear declaration to the Editorial Office where there is a potential conflict of interest. Authors, from January 2004, will be required to reveal conflicts of interest at submission. If their paper is accepted, their statements will be published.

Ethical Approval

Not all research in medical education requires formal approval from an ethics committee. However, we require all authors to state whether they have received approval for the work described in their paper and if so, from whom. If no ethics approval was sought, we request that authors make this clear.

Review of Editors' papers

Some general medical journals do not allow editors to submit their own work. *Medical Education* is the leading journal in a specialist field and we cannot afford to refuse work from the best researchers just because they may also be our editors, nor should we deny our editors the right to publish in the best journal.

The following policy applies to all academic Editors of the journal.

The author-editor should preferably not be the corresponding author, although in cases of sole authorship this is unavoidable.

The paper is received, checked for anonymity, then sent to a Deputy/Associate Editor by the Editorial Office at random.

The assigned Deputy/Associate Editor may after preliminary screening send the blinded paper for review to at least two reviewers, one of whom may be either another Deputy/Associate Editor (or the Editor in Chief where he is not an author) acting in ignorance of the authors' identity. This is to reduce the risk of bias in the allocation of reviewers and to act as a backup in the unlikely event of an appeal.

The Deputy/Associate Editor assigned to the paper sends a decision based on the reviewers' reports direct to the corresponding author. The author-editor is not involved in any decision to publish.

Following acceptance, decisions on whether to commission a commentary or editorial based on the paper should be taken by the Editor in Chief when he is not the author or, where he is an author, by the Deputy/Associate assigned to the paper.

Priority for publication is decided by the Deputy/Associate Editor assigned to the paper in consultation with the Editorial Office.