



## Defining ourselves by our publication ethics

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Since its inception in early 2012, the GJMEDPH has steadily gained ground in the daunting (and competitive) world of biomedical publications. For a journal to succeed and become recognized, reputable and respected, authors, editors and reviewers must adhere to high standards in their mutual task of producing valid, clear, easily accessible publications. As straightforward and cogent policy, the GJMEDPH ascribes to the Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals (URM), compiled by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE)<sup>1</sup>. The URM (revised 2010) state the ethical principles in the conduct and reporting of research and provide recommendations related to editing and writing, serving to improve the quality and clarity of reporting in manuscripts, as well as the ease of editing. The initial sections of the URM address the ethical principles associated with the process of evaluating, improving, and publishing manuscripts in biomedical journals and the relationships among editors and authors, peer reviewers, and the media. The latter sections address the more technical aspects of preparing and submitting manuscripts.

Yet, what constitutes ethical publication standards is evolving and expanding in the dynamic world of electronic publications, where loose boundaries and gateways (as is prone with the "information highway") allow erroneous assumptions, confusion and ignorance to operate: most aspiring authors learn their writing skills informally, following the advice and approach of mentors, and under pressure to publish. Thus, it is helpful that easily available and accessible resources exist for authors and editors to affirm, improve and promote standards. In addition to ICMJE, two other bodies relevant to academic journals are the Committee on Publication Ethics

(COPE), and the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME).

COPE provides a forum for editors and publishers of peer-reviewed journals to discuss all aspects of publication ethics, and, in particular, how to handle cases of research and publication misconduct<sup>2</sup>.

Membership is open to editors and publishers of peer-reviewed academic journals, and individuals or companies not eligible to be Full Members (i.e. not journal editors or publishers) but who are interested in publication ethics and are working in or associated with the publication of peer-reviewed scholarly journals. Its Code of Conduct for Journal Editors (mandatory) provides a minimum set of standards COPE members are expected to adhere to. Its Best Practice Guidelines (voluntary) are more aspirational, developed in response to requests from editors for guidance for a wide range of increasingly complex issues. WAME aims to facilitate cooperation and communication among editors of peer-reviewed medical journals, and promote professionalism in medical editing through education, self-criticism and self-regulation, while encouraging research on the principles and practice of medical editing<sup>3</sup>.

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As WAME succinctly states: “a medical journal has a social responsibility to improve the human condition and safeguard the integrity of sciences”. If there is cause to question scientific integrity and conduct, the three industry associations cited above (ICMJE, COPE, WAME) provide guidelines that aid in ensuring that the matter is appropriately pursued, including outlining the roles and responsibilities of the concerned parties. All those in the biomedical and public health fields should be familiar with their websites: too often, the ethics applied to authorship and publication have been seen as secondary to those demanded in scientific research, and traditionally less rigour has operated with the former compared to the latter. Good publication practices do not develop by chance <sup>4</sup>.

Our advancement and diffusion of health information has changed dramatically (and especially in the last decade) by the use of the internet in its production, dissemination, communication and networking, with significant gains in reducing cost and time over print publication<sup>5</sup>. Nonetheless, contributions to the field, while understandably motivated by both professional interests and rewards mixed with personal satisfaction, must remain grounded in trust and credibility: of the author and their work as represented, and of the editorial and publication process as thorough, objective and fair. We will come to know ourselves by how well-placed that credibility and trust is perceived to be by our global community of authors, reviewers, editors and readers that constitute the GJMEDPH.

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