

The Importance of Publication Ethics

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As a peer-reviewed publication, *The Ochsner Journal* serves an important role in the transference of medical knowledge and in the promotion of the highest levels of professional standards and publication ethics. These dual roles require that all parties involved in the process—editors-in-chief, authors, reviewers, and editorial staff—share in the important responsibility of adhering to the same professional standards and publication ethics.

As an editor-in-chief, I must ensure (1) the prompt acknowledgment of receipt of submitted manuscripts, (2) the strict confidentiality of the content of a submitted work, and (3) the expedient selection of reviewers to complete the peer-review process. Ultimately, I make the final decision on all manuscripts submitted to the *Journal*. Within the context of these duties, it is my responsibility to respond promptly and fairly when an ethical issue or complaint arises concerning a submitted or published manuscript.

We have several processes in place to ensure the *Journal's* compliance with the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors ethics guidelines. Since 2013, we have scanned all manuscript submissions with the iThenticate plagiarism software and have rejected the submissions discovered to have material appropriated from other sources. We do not accept previously published tables or graphics without written permission from the copyright holder. All authors are required to sign and submit an *Author Responsibility, Financial Disclosure, Copyright Transfer and Acknowledgment* form, confirming that their work is original, that it represents their own scholarly product, and that the manuscript has not been submitted to any other publication

for consideration. To this last point, even if the work is of an original nature, we reject submissions that would otherwise result in a duplicate publication. We also require all authors to disclose their financial conflicts and publish those conflicts in the Acknowledgments section of the article.

In recent months, we have turned our ethics spotlight on the peer-review process, paying close attention to potential conflicts of interest when we assign reviewers, instituting an evaluative process to provide feedback to reviewers about the quality of their reviews, and requiring reviewers to complete their assignments in a timely fashion. All of these measures are specifically designed to enhance the rigor of our reviews and to ensure that authors receive the most constructive feedback possible for improving their manuscripts. We have also added a second review prior to making a decision on each manuscript. Revised manuscripts are now reviewed by the same reviewers who evaluated the original submission to determine if the authors addressed their recommendations. In some cases, manuscripts have been rejected after the second review because of the authors' failure to adequately address the review comments. The increased rigor of our peer-review process has had the positive effect of reducing the average time from submission to final decision from 60 days to 31 days.

We are proud of these successes and will continue to brainstorm and implement practices to ensure the integrity of our processes and of the manuscripts we publish.

The Ochsner Journal is committed to the highest levels of professional standards and publication ethics and requires the same commitment from its authors and peer reviewers.