**Perceived Challenges to Open-peer Review and Opportunities for Education**

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**Abstract**

Objective: Anonymous peer review, the trademark of most scientific journals has been criticized for its lack of accountability/transparency. Open-peer review, defined as a transparent process whereby the identities of the reviewers or participants contributing scientific disclosures are published, has only been adopted by a small number of journals/publishers. We examined receptiveness to an open-peer review process.

Methods: A 9-question multiple-choice survey was emailed via QuestionPro to editors/publishers in the healthcare sciences field.

Results: No respondents employed an open-peer review process; only 1 journal stated that the topic was currently under discussion. The remaining respondents who indicated no plans for an open-peer review process cited reasons belief that the review quality will be negatively affected, increased difficulty in recruiting new reviewers and disagreement with open-peer reviews. When asked about their awareness of scientific research surrounding open-peer review, 40% (2/5) indicated no awareness, 60% (3/5) indicated some awareness, and none indicated a high level of awareness. In interest in a forum where the risks/benefits of open-peer review could be discussed was favored by 80% (4/5) of respondents. Participant ranked 5 perceived challenges of open-peer review, belief that review-quality would be negatively affected (80% [4/5]) and perceived difficulties in recruiting new peers were ranked as the top challenges to implementing open-peer review (60% [3/5]).

Conclusion: While the survey size limits the ability to generalize, data indicate an opportunity for further education, discussion, and research in this area.

**BACKGROUND**

• Research articles have traditionally been reviewed anonymously before publication. Anonymous peer review, a process in which reviewers are aware of the identities of the authors but the authors do not know the identities of the reviewers, has been criticized as it opens the bias and ethical abuse, and lacks accountability and transparency. Anonymous reviewers have the opportunity to inappropriately delay or prevent publication of work or usurp ideas, wording, and methods from manuscripts they are reviewing.3,4

• An open-peer review, in which reviewers and authors are aware of each other’s identities would be expected to increase accountability, fairness, and transparency; but has been adopted by few scientific journals or publishers.

**Table 1. Survey Content**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Question</th>
<th>Response Choices</th>
<th>Respondents (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Does your publishing company currently employ or plan to employ an open-peer review process?</td>
<td>Yes or no</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. If you answered YES to Q1, how long have you had an open-peer review process?</td>
<td>Less than 6 months; 6 months to 1 year; 1 to 3 years; 3 to 5 years; 5+ years</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. If you answered YES to Q1, when was the MAPEEH (-Methods for Enhancing Peer Evaluation of Health Care-Research) process first implemented?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. If you answered YES to Q1, what challenges, if any, do you face in implementing an open-peer review process?</td>
<td>Resistance by some authors; reluctance by some reviewers; increase in time needed to review articles; more time needed to complete the peer review process; need for more internal infrastructure to monitor quality of review; fear of peer reviewers refusing to review articles</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The following challenges are perceived for open-peer review process. Please rank the 5 you think are the biggest perceived challenges.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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<td>6. If you answered NO to Q1, does your publishing company employ an open-peer review process in the future?</td>
<td>Yes, in the next 6 months; yes, in the next 12 months; yes, in 1–3 years; yes, in 3–5 years; no, 5+ years</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. If you answered NO to Q1, why has there currently no plan to implement an open-peer review process?</td>
<td>Difficulties with the open-peer review process; disagreement with open peer review; difficulty recruiting peer reviewers to complete the peer review process; need for more internal infrastructure to monitor quality of review; fear that there will be difficulty recruiting new peer reviewers</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Are you aware of the scientific research that has been conducted to date on open-peer review process?</td>
<td>Very aware; somewhat aware; not aware at all</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Would you be interested in a forum where the risks/benefits and risks of an open-peer review process can be discussed and debated?</td>
<td>Yes or no</td>
<td>5</td>
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</table>

**OBJECTIVE**

• We sought to examine awareness, receptiveness, and perceptions about the open-peer review process in the healthcare journal arena.

**METHODS**

A 9-question, multiple-choice survey (Table 1) was developed and emailed via QuestionPro to 9 editors/publishers in the healthcare sciences field inviting their feedback on the survey (editors/publishers were chosen based on previous working relationships). Decision for open-peer review could reside at either journal or publisher level.

• Five (56%) of the 9 invited responded.

**RESULTS**

• Responders represented journals and publishers covering a range of therapeutic areas, specialties, and countries.

• Two (40%) of the responders were editors in chief; three (60%) indicated “other” (editorial director, sales professional, and publisher/editor in chief).

• None of the journals/publishing companies of the responders used open-peer review.

• Of the responders, 3 (60%) were somewhat aware and 2 (40%) were not at all aware of scientific debate on open-peer review.

• Four (80%) of responders stated their journal/publishing company had no current plans to implement open-peer review; one (20%) stated that the topic was currently under discussion.

• The most common reason cited for lack of interest in implementing open-peer review was belief that review quality would be negatively affected (80% [4/5]).

**CONCLUSIONS**

• While no respondents used open-peer review or were very aware of the scientific research conducted to date on open-peer review, most were interested in a forum where open-peer review could be discussed and debated.

• The survey size limits the ability to generalize but results indicate an opportunity for further education, discussion, and research in this area.

• The questionnaire used in this study sought feedback from journal editors/publishers. Authors, peer reviewers, and readers may have different views.

**REFERENCES**


**Figure 1. Reasons Cited for Not Implementing Open-peer Review (n = 4)**

**Figure 2. Rank Order of Perceived Challenges to an Open-peer Review Process (n = 5)**

**DISCLAIMER**

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[1-11]: See references.