Journal Watch

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Excerpts from *European Science Editing*

Comments on the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment

The August 2013 issue of *European Science Editing (ESE)*, the journal of the European Association of Science Editors, included a couple of articles relating to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment, on which I comment elsewhere in this issue of *MEW* (see page 273). Briefly, the Declaration aims to change the way in which research is judged, challenging the reliance on the journal impact factor (IF). Writing in *ESE*, Werner Marx of the Max Planck Institute outlines some of the shortcomings of the IF for assessing research and discusses alternatives such as the Relative Citation Rate (RCR, the 'observed citation rate of an article divided by the mean expected citation rate').[1] Highlighting a problem inherent to both the IF and the RCR – the lack of normalisation of number of citations according to subject and publication year – Marx describes a 'percentiles' method, which 'gives an impression of the impact [an article] has achieved in comparison to similar items in the same publication year and subject category', to overcome these limitations. This percentiles method was previously presented in an earlier *ESE* article.[2]

In the same issue of *ESE*, R Grant Steen describes the Declaration as 'a sprawling document that attempts to serve a variety of needs, but may serve none of them well', criticising it for bashing the IF without proposing an alternative.[3] While acknowledging that the IF is flawed, and indeed listing its flaws, Steen argues that it can in fact be used to assess research quality, highlighting a study of 979 papers by the Wellcome Trust which found that expert assessment of importance (non-blinded) was strongly correlated with IF of the journal of publication.[4] Though he accepts that the IF should not be used to assess individual papers or an individual researcher's output, he questions whether the alternatives are as good.

Other articles of interest in 2013 issues of ESE

- **August 2013:** Nikhil Pinto highlights some of the more common style errors in scientific papers in an excellent short article.[5] Among other things, Pinto describes the difference between 'cases' and 'patients' and explains why one should write petri dish, gram-positive, graafian follicle, western blotting (lower case), Gram stain (upper case), data are (plural), and Parkinson disease (no apostrophe).
- **May 2013:** This issue included short pieces outlining the benefit of statistical knowledge for copy editors working with academic publications[6] and describing patchwork plagiarism (in which text from multiple sources is weaved together in a new article),[7] including its detection and avoidance.
- **February 2013:** In an opinion piece on authorship,[8] R Grant Steen explains the vulnerability of the old ICJME criteria for authorship (since revised) to misuse. He argues for a new criterion: 'free and unfettered access to all raw data'. Elsewhere in the same issue, Denys Wheatley lists what he considers to be some of the commonest clichés in scientific papers,[9] and Hasan Shareef Ahmed and Armen Yuri Gasparyan explore potential solutions to some of the problems surrounding peer review.[10]

References

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