A new outlet for medical education scholarship

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Abstract

Not needed for editorial

Main body

As medical education research grows in popularity and relevance, the number of submissions to the relatively small number of medical education journals increases steadily. As an example, Medical Teacher has recorded a 350% growth in annual submissions over the last 10 years. Even with growth in publishing space in the on-line format, the acceptance rate has decreased over the same time to about 8%. For optimists like me, this is good news, because it highlights the strength of our academic discipline. Hence there is room for another publishing venue.

It may also be time for a fresh way of publishing medical education articles. Hard copy journals are becoming less prominent, as digital media creates opportunities for increased and speedier publication that is both less expensive and more likely to be current at publication. Many journals are now either entirely on-line, or at least inclusive of substantial on-line sections and refereeing systems. Editorial Boards no longer need to meet face to face, and reviewers can contribute to decisions from any corner of the globe. Open review is becoming more common, as the academic community recognises and tries to minimise bias in editorial decisions and make the editorial process a more valuable learning experience for contributors. For 20 years or more there have been calls to reform academic publishing (Mahoney, 1977), based on continuing debates about the potential for publication bias from using a relatively small group of experts, some of whom may have vested interests. There is also the concern about ‘confirmatory bias’, where reviewers may support publication of results that support their own beliefs or what is already known, when results that are unexpected or prove that some initiatives do NOT work can be helpful and should be widely accessible (Smith, 2006). Reviewers’ reports may also reflect bias based on personal opinions and have been shown to be inconsistent (Texeira and Dobranski, 2014).

MedEdPublish represents a further stage of innovation in this rapid evolution of publishing. The entire platform is web-based. Contributions may be in any of several categories – original research, case studies, practical tips and
guidelines, personal commentaries, systematic reviews, book reviews or letters – from undergraduate, postgraduate or continuing education in any context. Negative findings are welcome. The genuine innovation is where contemporary social media meets traditional academic processes – the Editorial Board will apply only a ‘light touch’ review prior to publishing. This is a key step, because there will have to be some filter for relevance, methodological quality and readability, but the intention is to publish all articles that are potentially credible. All reviews will be post-publication and will be available almost immediately on-line, potentially creating a rapid-response discussion thread around each contribution. Articles will receive a rating of from 1 to 5 stars, one by the formal reviewers and one by the general readership. Authors will find out what both groups think of their work, providing opportunities to learn from a wide variety of sources. MedEdPublish aims to have articles that receive strongly positive reviews and recommendations by the formal reviewers - achieving 5 or perhaps 4 stars, listed by indexing and abstracting services including PubMed, making this an attractive proposition for contributors with academic appointments. All authors may receive helpful guidance to improve their work, with the possibility that improved versions may be submitted after responding to reviewers’ comments.

Is there a risk that the platform will not achieve the reputation for quality developed by more established journals? Perhaps there will be some initial resistance to change, as we have become used to ‘hidden’ review processes giving a stamp of approval. On the other hand, many articles being declined are of high quality, but just not far enough up the rankings to pass the increasingly difficult acceptance point. This approach offers potential to get more of those good articles into circulation. Those articles with high star ratings and good reviews should achieve the same citation potential as those published in the more established journals. Our aim is to maintain or improve the quality of academic publishing through a different editorial process.

Is there a risk in submitting a paper that is judged to have serious methodological flaws or errors in interpretation? Well, perhaps there is. A low rating by experts and peers in such an open system might be embarrassing and even unlikely to facilitate academic career progress. As with any academic journal submission process, contributors should ask colleagues to read their articles and provide feedback before submission, to make sure that the initial submission is sound. It is important that all reviews are framed constructively. Our reviewers will take this educational approach, and all readers should follow normal social media etiquette: politeness, authenticity, consistency, generosity, ‘observing the ‘rules' and thinking before posting are important (Minocha and Petrie, 2012). There are safeguards to reduce the risk of inappropriate wording in reviews from the wider readership, with a prominent ‘Report Abuse’ button on each page.

I am really excited by the opportunity to not just expand publishing in academic medicine, but also to steer publishing down a slightly different path. I look forward to receiving your contributions.

Take Home Messages

Notes On Contributors

Richard hays is Professor of Medical Education at the University of Tasmania and The Editor of MedEdPublish.
Acknowledgements

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Appendices

Declaration of Interest

The author has declared the conflicts of interest below.

I am the Editor of this journal