

## Peer-Reviewed Journals: Guarding the Jewels of the Profession

**D**oomsayers foretell a guarded prognosis for medical journals. In an information-rich and time-poor environment, they intone, physicians will choose the headline news instead. Not only do tabloids and “throwaways” (note: *EyeNet* is a subscription member

benefit!) package information in an easily digestible puree, but they can also publish quickly, unrestrained by the rigors of data analysis, manuscript preparation and revisions based on peer review. I, however, see a series of concordant trends that presage a much brighter future for ophthalmic journals. To capitalize on these trends, the journals must evolve while retaining their core values. What, then, are the trends, and what are these core values?

### Trends

The most striking trend of the past two decades is electronic. Via computer, manuscripts are easier to prepare and to revise and can be sent instantaneously to the editor and peer reviewers. Similarly, the Internet has facilitated literature searches. A siege of *Index Medicus* is no longer required; all that is necessary is a few mouse clicks. The curse of information availability is the difficulty of filtering the good from the bad, or the trustworthy from the fraudulent. Herein lies a great strength of journals: their sterling reputation for credibility and fairness. Readers do rely on what they read therein.

The second trend is the inexorable

emphasis on evidence-based practice, which will become a metric by which we will all be measured and a standard to which payment will be tied. Ophthalmic journals are the repository for most of the evidence on which the practice of ophthalmology will be based.

### Core Values

In responding to these trends, both electronic and evidence-based, journals in ophthalmology must be careful to respect and celebrate their core values. The principal value is the peer-review system, which is especially important in an age of information overload. Although readers are not relieved of their responsibility for critical evaluation, at least there is reassurance that someone else has had a good, hard look at the paper.

The second core value is attractiveness to the journals' three categories of customers: authors, readers and financial supporters. Authors care about reputation, speed of publication and fairness. Readers care about relevance, timeliness and dependability. Supporters care about readership and whether their investment is accomplishing their own goals.

### Challenges

Positioning journals to take advantage of trends while holding to core values is good strategy, but formidable challenges await. As pressure builds to make content available online (and for free), costs of peer review and editing become more difficult to recover. Peer reviewers must be actively recruited and taught efficient methods of performing a good review. Residents must also learn the skill of reading journals and the need to conform practice to published evidence. Last, journals must continually seek to improve attractiveness to customers.

Is an optimistic prognosis for ophthalmology journals justified? Let us hope so, for the sake of our profession and that of our patients.



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