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Behind the scenes at JPAHS: perspective of the editorial assistants

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Introduction

Medical journals operate with rigorous editorial workflow to ensure that the published content is credible and ethically sound, but these processes and workflow remain largely opaque to the authors and readers. In this journey narrative, the editorial assistants at Journal of Patan Academy of Health Sciences (JPAHS) aim to describe how a manuscript travels from submission to publication, covering the initial screening, peer review process, communication between authors and editors, and production emphasizing on their role in all of this. Much of our role involves the invisible but essential work of ensuring manuscripts comply with journal standards, ethical principles, and international guidelines such as those set by Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) ^{1,2}

Becoming an editorial assistant

At JPAHS, the selection of editorial assistants begins once students enter their clinical years, typically in the third year of the MBBS (Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery) program. From each batch, two students are chosen through a competitive process. The initial screening is conducted by their immediate seniors using an extensive Google Form designed to assess interest and prior experience in research, writing and publication. Responses are anonymised, reviewed and scored by the remaining editorial assistants, after which the top two candidates are selected.

The Editorial Journey

Submission and Initial Triage

Submitting an article begins the editorial process at JPAHS. Submissions are made through the Open Journal Systems (OJS). The initial triage is completed within days to weeks and it involves checking manuscripts



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against the Submission Preparation Checklist and author guidelines. Here, editorial assistants play a key role, reviewing adherence to formatting, and verifying authorship declaration. We also support editors in screening submitted manuscripts for originality and ethical compliance, in line with COPE standards.¹

Peer Review Process

Once the manuscript gets a green signal from the first triaging, it enters the peer review phase. At JPAHS, this is a double-blind process, where reviewers are chosen for their expertise, availability and absence of conflict of interest. Editorial assistants support this stage by helping to identify suitable reviewers, managing correspondence and ensuring timelines are followed. We also help check that reviewer feedback aligns with reporting guidelines and assist editors in compiling comments before the final decision is conveyed to authors.

Production and Publication

Once an article is accepted, it enters the production stage. The manuscript is formatted to meet the journal's layout, with headings and text adjusted to the specified font type and size. Grammar, punctuation, and overall formatting are carefully reviewed to create the final copy for proofreading. The proof is then sent to the author, who is asked to check for errors in text, numbers, legends, and references. Authors are typically requested to return their corrections within a set timeframe. As editorial assistants we function as the bridge between the authors, reviewers and editors.

Each article published at JPAHS represents a collaborative effort between the reviewers, editors and authors that aims to maintain transparency, academic integrity and advancement of scientific research.

Lessons Learned

For us, being an editorial assistant has been more than an extracurricular role; it has been a hands-on education in research methodology, academic writing skills and publication ethics. It has shown us how science is communicated, what makes research credible and how errors can undermine trust. This experience has strengthened our own academic skills, given us confidence to pursue research, and instilled in us a deeper accountability to the scientific community.

Conclusion

The editorial process at JPAHS is both rigorous and evolving. From initial screening to final proofing, our role is to safeguard quality, uphold ethics and support the editorial process. Though the work is voluntary and often challenging, it has been a transformative learning experience, one that not only benefits the journal but also shapes us as young doctors and future researchers.

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Conflict of Interest

All the authors are editorial assistants of JPAHS and weren't involved in the editorial process of this manuscript.

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