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## Serving as a Peer Reviewer: Rewards and Challenges

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## Serving as a Peer Reviewer: Rewards and Challenges

Evidence-based practice (EBP) is critical in providing quality patient care (Melnik & Fineout-Overholt, 2015). The American Nurses' Association (ANA) identifies "Evidence-based Practice and Research" as one of the "standards of professional performance" that nurses must adhere to (ANA, 2015, p. 77). ANA's *Faith Community Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice* (2013) specifically states that "The faith community nurse integrates evidence and research findings into practice" (p. 39). A synthesis of research presented in peer-reviewed journals is an important component of evidence-based practice. A peer-reviewed journal utilizes a process where submitted manuscripts are reviewed by another professional individual with similar expertise. The performance of academic peer review started over 300 years ago and it continues to be a much needed practice for journals to implement in order to disseminate quality information (Francis, 2013).

### Peer Review Process

Generally speaking, the peer review process starts with an author submitting a manuscript to an editor for publication consideration. Subsequently, the editor completes a general overview of the manuscript and then sends it to a designated number of peer reviewers. The peer reviewers complete a review and provide constructive feedback to the author and to the editor. The editor will then communicate with the corresponding author regarding a decision concerning publication in the specific journal (Guerrieri, 2012). Typically one of the following decisions is provided to the author: (a) accept the manuscript with no revisions, (b) provisionally accept the manuscript pending minor revisions, (c) reconsider the manuscript after major revisions, or (d) decline the manuscript. If minor or major revisions are required, the author may choose to make recommended revisions to the manuscript and resubmit for peer review.

The peer review process may be open or blind. The open process is when the author has information regarding the identity of the peer reviewers and the peer reviewers have knowledge of the author (Double-blind peer review, 2012). A blinding peer review process is typically used; which may be a single blind or double blind process. In single blind peer review, the reviewers know the author's identity, but the authors do not know who is conducting the review. In the double blind review process information regarding the author's identity and with whom the author is affiliated is not available to the reviewers (Guerrieri, 2012). Additionally, the authors do not know names of reviewers. The double blind review process is thought to eliminate potential bias that may be present due to reviewers knowing the author.

Baggs, Broome, Dougherty, Freda, and Kearney (2008) surveyed 1,675 peer reviewers for nursing journals to examine preferences regarding blinding. Double-blinding was the method most frequently encountered (noted by 96% of respondents) and 93.6% of reviewers responded that this was their preferred method (Baggs et al., 2008). In a survey of editors conducted by Kearney and Freda (2005), 70 out of 88 editors (80%) responded they believed blinding was important to the peer review process. When questioned about the open review process; 53% of respondents stated they did not see any benefit, 24% stated they were not sure, and 24% responded there could be some benefit of the open process (Kearney & Freda, 2005).

### Peer Reviewers

Peer reviewers play a critical role in the publication process by providing valuable feedback to authors regarding how to improve manuscripts and to editors regarding the publication decision (Henly, 2013). When providing feedback, reviewers should provide positive comments as well

as opportunities to improve the submitted manuscript. It is also important for reviewers to be collegial and respectful of their peers and provide constructive feedback in a positive tone. This offers encouragement for future contributions to nursing literature which supports the ongoing refinement and growth of the profession's body of knowledge (Harding, 2010).

### **Challenges and Rewards**

Having sufficient time is one of the biggest challenges reported by peer reviewers. Kearney, Baggs, Broome, Dougherty, and Freda (2008) surveyed reviewers from 44 countries. Of those responding, 27.8% reported completing a review late and 90% stated it was related to lack of time due to work commitments. Lack of time was also the number one reason reported for declining requirements for completing a review. Reviewing poorly written manuscripts was reported as the second most common challenge (Kearney et al., 2008).

Although peer reviewers typically serve as unpaid volunteers (Francis, 2013), they report rewards derived from conducting manuscript reviews. Personal acquisition of new knowledge, contributing to the advancement of nursing science, impacting nursing practice, and assisting authors have been reported (Kearney et al, 2008). Francis (2013) conducted a survey which included asking respondents why they served as a peer reviewer. Findings included 70% believed it was a means to keep up with research, 12% stated it was to help fulfill promotion requirements, and 6% served to use for the tenure process (Francis, 2013). Editors recognize the valuable service of peer reviewers and often provide acknowledgment of peer reviewers by an annual listing in one of the journal editions.

### **Guidelines**

Peer reviewers are provided with journal specific peer-review processes and/or guidelines. Hirst and Altman (2012) reported 35% of journal websites reviewed had online peer review instructions. Of the 35%, all provided information about the review process, 95% contained manuscript evaluation instructions, and 93% provided information on reviewer etiquette (Hirst & Altman, 2012). The mission and peer review guidelines serve as the cornerstone for the authors in selecting a journal; likewise, the reviewers utilize these in determining the merits of the manuscript for the journal's targeted audience.

### **Summary**

Being a peer reviewer requires a time commitment, but there are many rewards. Professional nurses considering serving as a peer reviewer should consider their area of expertise, examine the mission of the journal, and the journal peer reviewer guidelines. For example, if someone is interested in faith community nursing, they should take time to examine the mission of the *International Journal of Faith Community Nurses*, the official journal of Faith Community Nurses International, and the peer review guidelines. After reviewing, they could thoughtfully consider serving as a peer reviewer to aide in advancing the practice, research, and education of faith community nurses.

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