## [2929] TITLE: Ethics of publication process: How do indexed Indian biomedical journals measure up?

**Internal review comments**:

1.     The subject is very interesting.

2.     Two separate issues studied: (a) the instructions to authors based on the websites, and (b) retractions within a specified period, and the reasons. The data is different, the data collection methods are different, and the possible explanations and implications are different. These should be reported on separately.

3.     The authors need to explain more clearly what was missing, and what they have added to the existing research. This could be given in the Discussion section.

4.     The checklist for data collection on the instructions to authors needs to be presented in a uniform manner for clarity.  To illustrate, “animal ethics” and “privacy and confidentiality”, and “mentions following the ICMJE…” are three different types of description. The last is most clear. So, depending on what exactly the authors intend, for example, “contains a separate section on ethics”, “contains specific guidelines for reporting on ethical issues…”, “mentions privacy and confidentiality”, “requires authors to declare their respective contributions to the submission”, “specifically states that duplicate publication is prohibited”, etc.

5.     It is not clear how “plagiarism check” would fall under the checklist of instructions to authors. Did the instructions mention the use of plagiarism checks? If so, the statement should be phrased accordingly. The authors might also want to consider whether the mention of a plagiarism check – as opposed to doing one, without necessarily mentioning it in the author’s guidelines -- is a good gauge of a journal’s commitment to publication ethics.

6.     While the authors may choose not to look at journals of alternative medicine, the logic they offer here is not clear.

7.     Indexing details: the purpose of giving both current and past indexing status of the journals is not clear.

8.     Clarity in language. The word ‘website’ is used sometimes to mean ‘instructions to authors’

9.     The 14-point checklist needs to be justified. Could the authors confirm that these 14 points cover the key points of information on publication ethics to be given to potential authors? And some of the points do not seem to be relevant. Why should instructions mention COPE, or what specifically from COPE should the instructions mention?

10.  Table presentation needs clarification. For example, what is “ICMJE listed”? And CTRI is a registry, whereas CONSORT is a reporting format.

11.  The authors do note that animal ethics may not be relevant to all journals. But their justification for applying it anyway seems weak, as does the discussion that follows. It is not clear why instructions to authors should inform readers about specific ethical issues other than those that concern the journal.

12.  The discussion needs a lot of work, to ensure that it is clear, that it is not superficial, and that it discusses the findings with reference to the larger picture, which presumably is implications for publication ethics – which can loosely be described as practices towards ensure the scientific and ethical value of the body of knowledge – in India and what journal editors need to do. For example, when talking about assent, the authors might wish to talk about the relevance of assent in (presumably) research, and therefore to publication ethics.

13.  The Discussion section needs to address the 14 points in a uniform manner, using the same subheads, and in the same order, as used in the checklist.

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