**Manuscript evaluation guidelines**Title: **Ethics of publication process: How do indexed Indian biomedical journals measure up?**  
  
1. Importance of the paper  
  
*Does it address issues relevant to the fields of bioethics and medical ethics in the developing countries?*

Yes, it does.

2. Is it topical?  
  
*Is the issue discussed from another country's/culture perspective?*

No, the issue is directly relevant to India  
  
*Will it influence practice or policy?*

It does highlight lacunae in practice and policy.  
  
*Is it too specialized for the journal?*

No, it is not.  
  
3. Originality  
*Is the information /comment new?*

This does not come through very clearly in the paper. The message is not very new or different from what one would expect. However, it is still a message that should be made known through publication.

*Is there any likelihood of plagiarism?*

No.  
  
4. Conclusions  
*Is the interpretation warranted, unwarranted, well developed?*

The presentation of results requires a serious rethink. Re-analysis of the data as suggested in the detailed review will provide more relevant interpretations. In its present form, the data only allow a limited interpretation.

*Does the article contain loose generalisations?*

Yes, the discussion section is full of generalizations that are not relevant to this paper and has to be fully re-written.  
  
*Are there any important omissions?*

The methodology section has many important details missing (listed in the detailed review below).  
  
  
5. Other comments  
The authors have done a good survey. However, in its present form the data does not provide much information.  
  
6. Recommendation  
  
 ~~Accept as is~~  
  
 Accept with modifications (specify)  
  
 Major revision of both style and substance as detailed below.

7. Separate comments for the author

1. Title: “Ethics of the publication process” is broad term that includes ethical principles that guide the publisher, the editor, reviewers and authors. This is very clearly described in the Elsevier website: <https://www.elsevier.com/about/policies/publishing-ethics>

The scope of the present paper is only to do a descriptive evaluation or survey of the “guide to authors” given in the website. This, therefore, covers only one small aspect of “ethics in the publication process”. The title has to modified to indicate this specifically. I suggest something like: “Survey of completeness of ethics-related guidelines for authors in websites of indexed medical journals published in India”

2. Abstract: The first line of the abstract “…instructions to author on these websites need to be…”. What website are the authors referring to in the very first line of the abstract. I feel a structured abstract with background, methods, results and conclusions is an appropriate format for the abstract for this paper.

PubMed is only a search tool. MEDLINE and PubMed Central are the databases that PubMed searches. This has to be made clear.

What is meant by “actively looking for plagiarism”? Do the authors refer to the use a plagiarism-checking software?

Change “Data sharing was not mentioned ….” to “Guidelines regarding data sharing were not mentioned ….”.

Finally, what do the authors conclude? How do the authors interpret the data they got? Overall, were the journal websites good, average or bad when it came to stating their ethical guidelines for authors?

3. Introduction:

The authors say, “This type of assessment has been done in the past for a limited number of journals, or specialties”. It is important to briefly state what the results were from the studies done on the “limited number of journals, or specialties” in order to justify this study and establish the need for it.

What do the authors mean when they say “It has not been done across specialties and across major indexing databases.” More specifics regarding the specialties and databases already studied and published has to be provided.

PubMed is not an indexing data base. PubMed is a search tool for the MEDLINE and PubMed Central databases.

The inclusion of the number of retractions and reasons for retraction in this paper seems incongruent with the rest of the paper. Why do the authors think that an evaluation of “instructions to authors” should be linked to the number of retractions? Are they suggesting that retractions may be because the guidelines to authors are not adequate? On the other hand, do the “instructions to authors” provide details on the circumstances that would necessitate retraction of a paper published in the journal?

4. Methodology:

What is the definition of an “Indian journal”? Is it one that is published in India or one that is managed by a professional body in India? It is not clear.

A list of 3 publications are provided as references for the 14-point check-list that was used. It is not clear whether the check-list was obtained from these publications or modified from these publications or developed by the authors based on “review of literature”. More information is required on how this 14-point check-list was developed.

Is Figure 1 the check-list that was used? If so, it has to be clearly stated.

How many of the journals included are listed in Beall’s list of predatory journals. The journals on this list should be excluded from this study.

5. Results

The results, as presented, gives an idea about journal performance in specific areas. This type of descriptive analysis is good. However, they do not give a good idea of what is happening when you consider the adequacy of information provided as a whole in a particular journal. For example, how many journals were 100% satisfactory in all the 14 points assessed? How many journals had information that is considered 75 – 99% complete, how many 50 – 75% and so on and so forth. This type of analysis will give us a wholistic picture.

It would be interesting to see how much of the “instructions to authors” on these websites are plagiarized from other journal websites.

The results presented on retraction rates and reasons seems irrelevant to this paper.

6. Discussion

Again, PubMed is wrongly mentioned as an indexing database which it is not.

The authors say, “A study was conducted to assess reporting practice of ethics approval in four Indian journals, namely Journal of Association of Physicians of India (JAPI), Indian Journal of Surgery (IJS), Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology of India (JOGI) and Indian Journal of Orthopedics (IJO). A total of 673 articles were reviewed of which mere 163 (24%) reported ethics approval (6).” In this study, did the “instructions to authors” specifically state that obtaining IRB approval (or animal ethics approval) prior to initiating the study, is an essential pre-requisite for publication?

I find that the discussion on importance of various aspects of the checklist is not needed. It is universally accepted that following ethical guidelines is important and the readers may be referred to many excellent reviews already available that discuss these issues in great detail. The discussion section of this paper should be dedicated to discussing the results of this paper, rather than indulge in general thoughts about the importance of ethics.

The last 2 paragraphs in the sub-section “strengths and limitations” discussing publication fraud is again not relevant to this paper and should be removed.

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My name may be published