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VIEW POINT

Medical Journals

SHANKAR P R

ABSTRACT

The internet has revolutionized most aspects of biomedical communication, including biomedical journals. Many journals have their own websites. The Manuscript Submission process has been automated and manuscripts can be submitted online, obviating the need for paper copies.

The open access initiative has revolutionized the field of publishing. Many journals are following a system of open peer review where the reviewer and the author know each other's identity. Many journals offer personalized work areas to registered authors. PLoS one has started the system of post-publication peer review of published articles.

Article proofs and reprints of published articles are usually sent online. BioMedCentral publishes an article immediately on acceptance. "Online early" is a system followed by many journals to decrease publication delays. Blogs allow for informal communication and quicker publication of responses.

Open choice publication is beginning to be offered by publication houses. Voice files of articles may be accessible, and the summary of the journal may be available in audio format. Rapid responses and e-letters are becoming popular. Prepublication sites have not become really popular in the field of medicine. Systems like HINARI offer access to many medical journals, to authors in developing countries.

Key words: Indexing, Internet, medical journals, open access, open choice

Medical journals have undergone a number of changes over the years. In the recent past, the pace of these changes has accelerated. The internet has revolutionized most aspects of biomedical communication, including biomedical journals.

Journal Websites

Most medical journals have an established

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website, and have web presence. A journal website is a one-stop shop for information about the journal. The subject area of the journal, information on the editorial board, instructions for authors and contact details are all available on the journal site. Many big publishing houses like Springer (www.springer.com), Taylor and Francis (www.tandf.co.uk/journals), and Elsevier (www.elsevier.com) maintain their own group websites, which contain links to the various journals published by the house. One can search for journals by name or by subject category. Many sites allow browsing of journal lists alphabetically.

Manuscript Submission Process

The manuscript submission process is another area, which has been revolutionized by the web. Most journals are going in for an online manuscript submission and management system. The two most commonly used ones are ScholarOne (www.scholarone.com) and Editorial Manager (www.editorialmanager.com). These are multistep submission systems. One can register with the site and can choose a user name and password. You can be logged in using your username and password, and can submit your manuscript. The system builds a PDF of the manuscript for your approval, and once you approve the PDF, it is sent to the editorial office. The reviewer can log in, access the manuscript, download it, and post his/her comments. A few of the many journals using this system are the BioMedCentral family (www.biomedcentral.com), the Public Library of Science journals (www.plos.org), Singapore Medical Journal (www.sma.org.sg/smj), Medical Education (www.mededuc.com), and Academic medicine (www.academicmedicine.org).

Certain journals like Medical Education Online (www.med-ed-online.org), and Rural and Remote Health (www.rrh.org.au) have developed their own system, where you fill in a short online form, attach your manuscript, and send it to the editorial office. You can, of course, send the manuscript as an e-mail attachment, in case the journal does not have an online system. The online system requires a reasonably fast internet connection.

Open Access Initiative

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Open Peer Review

In 1996, the *Journal of Interactive Media in Education* launched open peer review. Reviewers' names are made public, and they are therefore accountable for their review, but they also have their contribution acknowledged. Authors have the right of reply, and other researchers have the chance to comment prior to publication. The reviewer knows the author's details, while the author knows the name and affiliations of the reviewer. In 1999, the *British Medical Journal* moved to an open peer review system, revealing the reviewer's identities to the authors, and in 2000, the medical journals in the open access group, published by BioMed Central, started using open peer review. As with the *BMJ*, the reviewer's names are included on the peer review reports. In addition, if the article is published, the reports are made available online as part of the 'pre-publication history'. Today, other journals like Academic Medicine, are moving towards open access. Journals like Medical Education offer reviewers the option of open access, if they are willing to reveal their identity. The names of the authors are still masked.

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Sending Corrections

Certain journals like PLoS and Journal of Clinical and Diagnostic Research (www.jcdr.net) send a preliminary version of the manuscript with major editions and changes being in the Microsoft word format, before they send the final PDF proof for copyediting.

Publication after Acceptance

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Blogs

Many journals have started blogs to allow for easier, informal communication among researchers, policy makers, and others. Medical humanities journals like Cell2Soul (www.cell2soul.org) have well established blogs. PLoS and BioMedCentral have also started their own blogs. BioMedCentral has a scheme under which individuals or societies can start their own independent open-access journal, or can convert an existing journal to Open-access and bring it under the BioMedCentral umbrella.

Open Choice Publication

Certain publishers like Springer are offering authors the option of 'Open Choice'. Here the author pays manuscript processing charges, and the manuscript can be freely accessed online. The Royal Society of the United Kingdom has a similar scheme for journals published by it.

Voice Files, Highly Accessed Articles

The Journal of Clinical and Diagnostic Research (<http://www.jcdr.net>) offers voice files of the published manuscripts to readers for a certain period of time. They also offer a reward system for authors. The New England Journal of Medicine (<http://nejm.org>) offers an audio summary of the issue. BioMedCentral has recently started applying a tag called 'Highly Accessed', for articles which have been accessed a certain number of times after their publication.

They also provide information about the top ten highly accessed articles during a particular time period, and for the time period since the journal was started. A similar service is also offered by JCDR.

Publication in Different Languages

The Journal of the International Association of Medical Science Educators (www.iamse.org/jiamse) is brought out in three languages, English, French and Spanish. Certain other journals offer abstracts in various languages.

Rapid Responses

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Prepublication Sites

Prepublication sites like ClinMed Netprints (<http://clinmed.netprints.org/>), started by the BMJ publishing group, High Wire press, and Stanford University, allow researchers to post their manuscripts on the site before publication in a journal. The site is currently not accepting new submissions. Prepublication sites have not become very popular in Medicine, unlike in other areas of science. Many journals consider placing a manuscript on a pre print site as dual publication. Many journals offer the option of fast tracking for especially important articles.

Magazines

The manuscript management system allows the author to track the paper through various stages of the review process. Journals like the Clinical Teacher (www.theclinicalteacher.com) are midway between a journal and a magazine, and are especially readable. The publication quality of the Clinical Teacher is excellent, and the photographs add to the general interest and readability. The Meducator (www.meducational.com/journal/), another magazine type journal in the field of medical education, is however, no longer published.

Manuscript Processing Charges

A problem for authors from developing countries is the processing fee that has begun to be charged by many journals for processing a manuscript. The fee is not returnable if your manuscript is rejected!

Indexing systems

Many countries have started their own indexing system for medical journals. Among the most famous is Pubmed (www.pubmed.com) of the National Library of Medicine of the United States. Hubmed (www.hubmed.org) offers an alternative interface to Pubmed. IndMed (www.indmed.nic.in) and PakMediNet (www.pakmedinet.com/) are two of the country specific systems. African Journals Online (www.ajol.info/) offers access to many journals published from the African Continent. SCIELO (www.scielo.org/) offers access to many journals published in the Spanish language.

Journal Impact Factors

The Impact factor was devised by Eugene Garfield, the founder of the Institute for Scientific Information, now part of Thomson, a large worldwide US-based publisher. Impact factors are calculated each year by Thomson Scientific for those journals which it indexes, and the factors and indices are published in *Journal Citation Reports*. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impact_factor).

The impact factor for a journal is calculated, based on a three-year period, and can be considered to be the average number of times published papers are cited, up to two calendar years after publication (including the calendar year in which it was published).

Free Access to Biomedical Journals

Services like HINARI (www.who.int/hinari/en), Free medical journals (www.freemedicaljournals.com) and Directory of Open Access Journals (www.doaj.org/), allow researchers in developing countries, access to a number of journals. PubMed Central (www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/) offers free full text access to journals, which are archived at the site. Google scholar (<http://scholar.google.com>) lets the searcher know how many times a particular article has been cited by others. It also allows the reader to access journals whose full text is freely available online.

Thus the internet has revolutionized the field of biomedical journals. Publishing, reading, and accessing journals have become easier. The challenge is to exploit this window of opportunity and further medical research in developing countries.