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Anonymity of reviewing - arguments for and against

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It is generally accepted that peer reviewing substantially raises the quality of manuscripts and maintains the required standard of a journal, which is why it still has no alternative (1). However, reviewing is undoubtedly a subjective procedure, which increases the responsibility of a reviewer (2). The question of anonymity of reviewers, i.e. single-blind or double-blind anonymity in the reviewing of articles submitted for publishing raised special attention in the last decade, probably with an aim to increase reviewing objectivity. As one of the postulates of guidelines for a code of ethics in journal publishing, FDI quotes the need for ensuring a fair and equitable refereeing process and identifying of attempts of unfair criticism and prejudice in the assessment of articles. The responsibility of reviewers to return manuscripts unrefereed if there is a conflict of interests is also cited (3), but without mentioning of mechanisms which would ensure this, except for personal integrity of a reviewer. Nevertheless, it cannot be disputed that a well-chosen reviewer may well be a competitor to the author(s) of the article, and therefore exposed to the conflict of interest, because he/she is supposed to be well acquainted with the matter of investigation (4). The aim of this presentation is to point to the advantages and disadvantages of anonymous and open peer review, as well as to clarify factors that would help editors of domestic biomedical journals to choose more appropriate system of reviewing.

In the last decade, editors of several international biomedical journals have carried out random surveys among their reviewers and authors, seeking opinion on the issue of anonymity of reviewing. Until recently, the anonymity of peer review was regarded non-disputable, accepted to ensure the needed objectivity, and to give satisfactory results (5). However, it was ascertained that review-

ers, in a great percent, and on the basis of several criteria, could recognize the author(s) of the article, or at least the institution where the investigation had been carried out, regardless to double-blind anonymity (6). It can be assumed that this percent could be even greater within close national confines, which led to considerations concerning possible advantages of open reviewing (a system in which the names of reviewers are known to authors, and *vice versa*).

Fabiato (7), who quoted several advantages, and also disadvantages of open reviewing has comprehensively analyzed this aspect of the reviewing process, which is extensively discussed in this presentation. Among arguments for open reviewing, the following are particularly stressed: motivation of reviewers to help the author(s), contribution to authors' credibility toward critical comments of known reviewers, elimination of abuse of anonymity (especially if conflict of interests exists), need for support of reviewers' opinions, contribution to better understanding and more polite comments, etc. As arguments against open reviewing, the following are quoted: fear of junior reviewers from reprisal of established authors, possibility of creating a favoring network between reviewers and authors, possible raising of an acceptance rate, possible slowing of the publishing process, etc. The overall opinion of the cited author is that the system of open reviewing, in comparison with anonymous reviewing, still has more advantages than disadvantages.

Finally, it is interesting to elucidate some other factors that could be decisive for editors of domestic biomedical journals when selecting a system of peer reviewing. It seems that knowledge of the authors' mentality can substantially influence this decision. In fact, it seems that some authors often understand critical comments of the reviewer as a negative personal attitude towards them. Therefore, under these circumstances, anonymous reviewing would probably create more favorable conditions for publishing results of biomedical investigations, although occasional compromises with open reviewing should also be welcomed.

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