July 30, 2007

To the Editor:

We are resubmitting our revised manuscript "What do the JAMA Editors Say When They Discuss Manuscripts That They are Considering For Publication? Developing a Schema for Classifying the Content of Editorial Discussion " for your consideration.

We have revised the manuscript to respond to the reviewers' comments as follows:

Ana Marusic

Compulsory revisions

1. It is not clear how possible biases related to notetaking were addressed.

In the Methods section we added a comment that the note-taker's notes were not verbatim transcripts of the discussion.

In the Discussion section we added a comment that we used note-taking at the meeting, and by their nature the notes are likely to be incomplete because the note-taker may not have heard or recorded all comments.

2. There is overlap in the three classification categories and the authors may need to justify the classifications presented in the manuscript.

We believe we make clear throughout the manuscript that the purpose of our project was to identify topics of discussion, and that the classification schema is but one way to organize our findings for presentation. We have added a comment to the second paragraph in the Discussion that the categories are overlapping.
3. The authors may want to address the generalizability of their findings

We have added a comment about the generalizability of our findings (last paragraph of the Discussion).

Marcus Muellner

Essential revisions

1. How many of the 7000 papers reach the discussion stage? Are these all kinds of manuscripts or just research papers?

We have retrieved numbers for 2003 from JAMA and have inserted them in the Background section. Of the 7000 submissions, 5064 are manuscripts and 940 reached the discussion stage.

2. Do editors use checklists when assessing papers? If yes, what influence might this have had on the categories?

The editors do not use checklists.

3. Add a few thoughts on the decision-making process for the papers that are rejected before the editorial discussion stage.

We added a few thoughts to paragraph 4 in the Discussion: "We did not collect any data on the manuscripts rejected before this stage, and cannot infer anything about the process leading to rejection. It is possible, for example, that some reasons for rejection are not reflected in the discussion of manuscripts considered at the manuscript meetings."

Discretionary

4. How many external referees are used, at least in the average? I assume the identified phrases also turn up in the reviews.

We added a statement that 2-3 referees are typically used. Identified phrases were from oral and written comments. Oral comments included peer reviewer comments reported by the editor (see para 3 of Methods section).

5. Add a pie chart describing the proportions of phrases in "science" and maybe one for "journalism" or add percentages to the counts in Table 1.

The goal of the project was to identify topics discussed by the editors, and to classify them so as to make the data more interpretable by readers, especially those interested in conducting future research on the publication process. Because this was our goal, and not hypothesis testing, our methods emphasize qualitative assessment and not statistical analysis and interpretation.

M. Chew

Compulsory
1. Give some consideration to likely sources of bias eg, were the observer's notes verbatim? Were there particular reasons not to record the discussions? How representative were the observed discussions?

Comments were added to the Methods section regarding the observer's notes not being verbatim, and the representativeness of the discussions observed. A comment was also added to the Background stating that "We did not use formal qualitative methods to analyze the information collected, rather our goal was to help to generate hypotheses for those doing research on editorial decision making and publication practices".

2. Did the authors separately analyse comments for papers that were rejected/accepted?

Yes, the results of this analysis are presented in the last line of the Results section.

3. I am not sure this is a cross-sectional study.

We revised the study design to conform to the reviewer's suggestion to describe our project more generally as an observational study.

4. I found it difficult to be sure of the specific research question in both the Abstract and Background sections

We changed the Abstract wording to be identical to the wording in the Background section. We did not use the wording suggested by the reviewer, however, as we feel it may imply to some readers that we intended to employ a quantitative/hypothesis testing approach, which we did not.

5. Background, para 2, sentence 2 to end of para - rather anecdotal and seems to go against the grain of having a null hypothesis a priori to conducting a study; suggest omitting this.

We moved the gist of this comment to the Background section and reworded our phrasing.

6. There are several mentions of JAMA's "mission" or "objectives" but the authors need to specific exactly what these are.

We added a table (new Table 1) with JAMA's objective and mission.

7. Selection criteria-rationale for studying meetings at JAMA

We added a statement to the last paragraph of the Discussion describing our rationale.

8. Methods, para 1, 4th sentence - comes across as a rather anecdotal comment; has this been somehow measured?

As noted, JAMA editors have different experience and roles (in-house/external,
full-time/part time, experienced/relatively new) and this probably factors in to their
habits. We do not have any measurement of the proportion of editors who bring
most of their papers to the table for decision and those who bring only papers
they feel have a good chance of acceptance. We added a phrase stating the
reason why manuscripts are typically read only by one editor.

9. Methods para 2 - what is meant by editors with "managerial" responsibilities?

We modified the wording to clarify that there are content editors and managing
editors. We feel the concept of managing editors is generally understood, but if
further clarification is needed we would be happy to oblige.

10. Methods Para 3 - What is meant by "elements of the paper"?

We changed this phrase to read "...a description of the paper topic and study
characteristics."

11. Methods para 7 - for the purposes of the analysis, how was publication bias
defined?

This section of the Methods describes our first iteration of the classification
schema and we feel it might be confusing to get into too much detail, since this
schema was subsequently replaced. To respond to the reviewer's concern, we
clarified that the term "publication bias" was defined earlier in the paper.

12. Methods para 8, 2nd sentence - an editorial comment perhaps best inserted
in the Discussion.

We modified the sentence to begin "We considered..." indicating that our
definition is influenced by our beliefs, and is not meant to represent a "truth"
about medical journalism.

13. Discussion, para 2, last sentence - not sure what is meant by recorded
evidence here.

We clarified our comment as follows: "hypotheses that have been tested in the
past (eg, whether publication is associated with statistical significance of results)
have mainly reflected individual authors' opinions and experience regarding the
decision-making process, and anecdotal rather than recorded evidence."

14. Discussion, para 5, last sentence - comment should be accompanied by
whether such influences were observed in this study.

We added an example of how such goals could influence selection of papers at
journals such as JAMA (but not limited to JAMA): "In addition, publishing is a
business with profit-making goals, which can indirectly influence a journal's scope
and selection of manuscripts11, for example selection of articles likely to be
frequently cited and thus positively influence the impact factor."

15. Discussion, final para, text "some parts..." might be more useful in
Introduction.
We have moved the text suggested and revised the Background accordingly.

16. Table 1 - Does the text under each item comprise direct examples of phrases used? Useful to state in Table caption.

A clarifying statement has been added.

Thank you to the editors and referees for many helpful comments that were used to strengthen our manuscript. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Kay Dickersin for the authors