Reviewer's report

Title: "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"

Version: 1 Date: 13 May 2007

Reviewer: Ana Marusic

Reviewer's report:

General
This an interesting and original study, describing a novel approach to describe and assess the processes during editorial decision on a manuscript submitted to a general medical journal. The material presented is original, the data valid, and conclusions reasonable and important for understanding biomedical publishing. The writing is clear and the tables appropriate.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

I have questions regarding the methodology – answering them would contribute to better understanding of the processes described:
1. The authors could address a possible limitation of the sampling procedure during the editorial meetings. The Methods sections states that the note taker recorded words and phrases spoken by the editor in the context of the manuscripts under discussion. As note taking was in real time and the editorial conversations of different speed and complexity, it is not clear how possible biases related to note taking were addressed, such as how the note-taker decided which terms were relevant for taking down, was there enough time for taking individual notes, and did note taking influence the speed and content of editorial communications.

2. Terms recorded in the study were classified into three different sets – science, journalism and writing. Judging from the descriptions of the components of the three classification sets, there is some overlap, and the authors may need to justify the classifications presented in the manuscript. For example, they classified „Presentations of the results” under „Science” schema, whereas it could also be classified under the „Writing” schema, especially as the characteristics listed („message, tone, context, scholarship, adequacy of references, CONSORT guidelines”) were really related to the structure and style of the manuscript. Also, the category „Important for medicine” and „Novel, new” was classified under the „Journalism” schema, although it could be argued that this category is related to the „Science” schema because it present novel findings important for medicine.

3. The authors may also want to address the generalizability of their findings to other biomedical journals. The study was done in a major, high impact factor journal. However, such journals represent a very small fraction of biomedical journals. According to the data from the Thomson Scientific (formerly ISI) databases, such as Web of Science, the category of „Medicine, General and Internal”, has about a hundred journals, and less than 5 have impact higher than 10, with the median impact of the whole category below 1. High impact journal is even less representative of almost 5000 journal in the Medline. This could be addressed in the Discussion section.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

None

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

None

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field
Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests. I am the editor in chief of a small medical journal, for which I receive no financial reimbursement.