Author's response to reviews

Title: Instructions to authors on case reporting is limited: A review of a core journals list

Authors:

Olanrewaju O Sorinola (sorional@talk21.com)
Dr Olufemi O Olufowobi (femi.olufowobi@bwhct.nhs.uk)
Aravinthan A Coomarasamy (Arri.coomarasamy@bwhct.nhs.uk)
Khalid S Khan (khalid.khan@bwhct.nhs.uk)

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Reviewer (Edson Moreira):

1a. Reviewer's comment: There are some errors in reporting the data. In table 1, the percentages of "consent required" and "hypothesis generation" for all journals should be multiplied by 100 (the same is true in the text of the results section for "hypothesis generation" instead of 0.05% it should be 5%).

Authors' response: We have taken the advice on board and have multiplied the percentages by 100 as suggested. This ensures that there are no more errors in the reporting of data in the revised manuscript.

1b. Reviewer's comment: In figure 1, there are 3 colours in the legend, but four in the graph.

Authors' response: We are not sure about what is meant by this remark. The number of colours in the graph and the legend are the same (3) in our figure 1. Perhaps there were unintended modifications during file transfer electronically.

2. Reviewer's comment: The authors should elaborate more on their suggested checklist in table 2. This could be accomplished by adding a brief comment about each topic suggested.

Authors' response: The checklist has been modified to accommodate this suggestion. This checklist has been provided as a guide only for the structuring of case reporting. Therefore, we do not feel that an exhaustive explanation is necessary.

Reviewer (Marjan Kijakovic)

1. Reviewer's comment: Minor essential revisions (such as missing labels of figures).

Authors' response: Missing labels on figures have been corrected.

Reviewer (Linda Ohler)

1. Reviewer's comment: The methods are fairly well described. I wondered about the term "survey". I was expecting the survey to be questions editors responded to rather than a review of websites containing instructions for authors. Perhaps the term survey is being used in a more expansive
Authors’ response: We agree with the reviewer on the lack of clarity within the term "survey" in this study and "review" is now our favoured term. Consequently, we have changed the title of the manuscript to 'Instructions to authors for case reporting are limited: A review of a core journal list.

2. Reviewer's comment: There is a minor issue of the percentages being rounded off to 50% in the result section of the summary/abstract and reported as 49.7% in the results section in the body of the text. This is also done with 23.3% vs 23% in reporting the data.

Authors' response: We have revised all figures to achieve consistent by rounding off all percentages to the nearest integer.

3a. Reviewer's comment: Inclusion of recommendations from ICMJE on case studies/reports.

Authors' response: Despite extensive literature search, we were unable to find the precise recommendation on case reporting by ICMJE, and we were therefore unable to incorporate this into our article.

3b. Reviewer's comment: Manuscript tells readers that OS and OO independently categorised the journals. "I think the authors' contributions should be excluded at the end of the manuscript.

Authors' response: We have removed the statement regarding contributions of authors, OS and OO, in categorising the journals.

3c. Reviewer's comment:
Reviewer expressed her views on consent, this was based on the HIPPA regulations in the United States.

Authors' response: We have included this suggestion in our revised discussion.

4. Reviewer's comment:
Add more depth of information to Table 2 to make it more comprehensive

Authors' response: Additional information has been added to increase the depth of the suggested checklist in the revised manuscript.

5. Reviewer's comment:
Please check the data on Table 1 and figure 1 to ensure accuracy. I found the data reported in these table and figure to be confusing.

Authors’ response: We apologise for the lack of clarity in the description of the table/ figure. In Table 1 the data on limits on pages, figures, tables etc are reported as median with interquartile ranges in bracket while the rest of the data are reported as actual numbers with corresponding percentages. However, the figure represents data reported as actual number with corresponding percentages of those journals that did or did not provided the listed information. This has been clarified in the revised manuscript.

Figure &Legend:
Yes - If the criterion was required by the journal.
No - If criterion was specifically not required by the journal.
Unreported- If no information was provided by the journal.
Reviewer (Jan Vandenbroucke):

1. Reviewer's comment: Should journals give instructions about case-series, genetic linkage studies, prognostic studies etc. In short, should journals give instructions about what ought to be the content of science (or education) and what is not?

Authors' response: Yes, Journals already give instructions on a wide range of publication types, for example, the CONSORT statement is an important research tool that takes an evidence-based approach to improve the quality of reports of randomized trials; QUOROM statement checklist (aims at improving the quality of reports of meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials; MOOSE consensus statement aims at improving the quality of reports of meta-analysis of observational studies in Epidemiology while the STARD statement aims at a standardised and accurate reporting of studies on diagnostic testing.

2. Reviewer's comment: Given the diverse purposes of case reports, a uniform structure is most likely impossible.

Authors' response: We acknowledge that case reports have diverse purposes. However, this does not negate the need for a minimum standard for reporting case report. Common sense standards provide 'a method in madness', which is likely to be a better approach than no methods at all.

3. Reviewer's comment: They have not thought about the purpose of instructions for authors, nor how this purpose should be applied to authors.

Authors' response: The other reviewers certainly disagreed with Vandenbroucke as they were positive about the question/purpose of our study and commended the work.

4. Reviewer's comment: The "hypothesis" forwarded by the authors, that instructions about case reports might differ for different types of journals carries little weight, and seems rather construed, as all types of clinical journal used case reports.

Authors' response: Perhaps Vandenbrouche overlooked some of the data and information reported in our study. Our findings did show that not all journals used case reports and those that published case report emphasised heterogeneously the different aspects of the content.

5a. Reviewer's comment: The authors fail to mention how many journals mention either "innovative", or "unusual", or "instructive" since these are all rephrasing of same idea.

Authors' response: In the content sections of case report as shown in Table 1 and figure 1, it clearly describes these "rephrasing" of the same idea as extracted from the journals.

5b. Reviewer's comment: Vandenbroucke queried the need for Table 2 and that it was too extensive (too diverse).

Authors' response: Other reviewers, especially Linda Ohler liked Table 2 and she even suggested making it more comprehensive. We have therefore retained Table 2 with some modifications.