

Description

Medical research is crucial; we realize that even more so in this time of crisis of the Coronavirus attack. However, the authenticity of the research is equally important, especially when it is medical science research that we are talking about. In fact, there's a small group of medical journal editors, called the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), who aim to improve the quality of medical science and the resulting publications. They meet once a year to update their "Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals".

You can find the ICMJE Recommendations on their website. The group has been working together for a decade now; they fund their own work and although they are not an open group, they do welcome comments and suggestions on their recommendations.

Many medical journals "follow the ICMJE Recommendations" and are listed on the ICMJE website. They openly state that they uphold the recommendations made by the ICMJE because they wish to promote the quality of medical science by adhering to the standards developed by the ICMJE.

Best Medical Journal Practices According to ICMJE

Journals aim to follow best practices and ethical standards when it comes to medical research and its reporting. The ICMJE guidelines help authors of medical research publications maintain the required standards by covering all aspects of publications including:

Authorship

Authorship confers credit to a researcher which results in academic, social, and financial implications. The contributions of each author must be stated and guidelines followed for author criteria.

Predatory journals

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Authors must be aware of these types of pseudo-journals and avoid submitting manuscripts to them for publication. Authors are responsible for evaluating the integrity and reputation of journals. Predatory journals often charge article processing charges, have no peer review process, and publish all articles submitted to them. In addition, authors must also refrain from citing these journals in their manuscripts.

Relationships and Activities

Relationships resulting in possible conflicts of interest – whether financial or non-financial – must be declared for transparency.

Publication Process

Authors must follow the paper submission and peer review process guidelines. Editors and reviewers must keep authors' manuscripts private and confidential since premature disclosure of any manuscript details may impair authors. Most importantly, authors deserve an unbiased, independent assessment of their manuscripts in a timely manner.

Correctness

Honest mistakes happen. On detecting an error, a correction notice gets published and previous electronic versions are updated with a prominent note about the correction.

Misconduct

This includes data fabrication, deceptive manipulation of images, failure to disclose relationships and activities, and plagiarism. In some cases, failure to publish results of clinical trials are considered misconduct. These cases need to be dealt with on an individual basis and the relevant procedures should be followed.

Copyright

The details of the copyright agreement must be clear.

Advertisements

Any adverts that appear in medical journals must follow strict guidelines and not influence editorial decisions. In addition, medical products that are harmful to health may not be advertised, nor should products be advertised that are in the editorial content.

Clinical Trials

Any trials involving patients must be registered in a public trials registry, with the trial registration number published in the paper.

Manuscript Preparation

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Details required during manuscript preparation including the title page, author information, abstract, methods, results, discussion, tables, figures, references, style, and format.

Conflicts of Interest

This is one of the most important declarations because medical research has public health implications. Conflicts of interest occur when the judgement of an interest may be influenced by a secondary interest. There are many stakeholders in the publication of research where a conflict of interest may arise. From a sponsor that could potentially interfere with an author's study, to an editor of a journal who wishes to publish their own work in that journal, readers will want to know such relationships so that they can decide whether or not to trust the research.

ICMJE Disclosure Form

The ICMJE facilitates scientific transparency with their "ICMJE Form for the Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest". This is their way of making financial or non-financial relationships and activities related to the research transparent. These relationships pertain to the work being published. For example, if the research involves a drug and one of the authors is on a drug advisory board, the latter must be disclosed in the form. Listing a relationship – such as grant funding received or participation on an advisory board – may not necessarily represent an influence on your work, but it assures the reader of your transparency.

Three Proposed Changes to ICMJE Disclosure

The ICMJE recently announced that they are open for comments for changes to their ICMJE Disclosure Form. Not all relationships are conflicts of interest, however it is important to disclose all so that the public can make their own judgements and trust the scientific process.

The aim is to increase the transparency and completeness of these disclosures:

1. Title change from "ICMJE Form for the Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest" to "The ICMJE Disclosure Form" to include all relationships and not only problematic ones. This will improve transparency.
2. All relationships disclosed by authors to enable readers to decide whether there are conflicts of interest.
3. A checklist included to make it easier for authors to disclose all relevant relationships and activities involved with their research.

How Will the Proposed Changes Help Authors?

Most authors strive for medical science that is ethical and of high quality. The new disclosure form will help authors submit the correct information and avoid oversights. Previously, readers interpreted any disclosure of relationships and activities as having an influence on the research. In the new proposed guidelines, all relationships and activities will be disclosed. The removal of the word "potential" from the title will also assist this. Furthermore, this new checklist will protect authors from erroneously excluding

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relationships and activities.

Have Your Say

As mentioned earlier, the ICMJE welcomes comments and suggestions to their recommendations of the proposed “ICMJE Disclosure Form”. If you have any suggestions for the ICMJE, get them in before the deadline of April 30, 2020.

Category

1. Journal Guidelines
2. Reporting Research

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2020/03/09
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