



## Saudi Medical Journal for Students (SMJS)

Official Journal of Faculty of Medicine University of Tabuk

ISSN: 1658-8274 (Print version); 1658-8282 (Electronic version)

# SAUDI MEDICAL JOURNAL FOR STUDENTS: SHOULD UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS BE CO-REVIEWERS IN A STUDENT MEDICAL JOURNAL?

Layan Hussain Alharbi<sup>1</sup>, Md. Tanveer Raza<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Editorial Manager of Peer-Review Process Saudi Medical Journal for Students and MedEdu Tabuk, Faculty of Medicine, University of Tabuk

<sup>2</sup>Editor-in-Chief, Saudi Medical Journal for Students and MedEdu Tabuk, Faculty of Medicine, University of Tabuk

**\*Corresponding author:** Dr. Layan Hussain Alharbi, Medical Intern, Editorial process manager, Saudi Medical Journal for Students (SMJS), Faculty of Medicine, University of Tabuk. Tel: +966558882623. Email: 361001744@stu.ut.edu.sa

To cite this article: Alharbi LH, Raza T. Saudi Medical Journal For Students: Should Undergraduate Students Be Co-Reviewers In A Student Medical Journal? 2022;3(1):1-4

The Peer-Review process is considered to be the most acceptable method of weighing the suitability of a manuscript submitted for publication in a medical journal [01]. Since the 19th century, when the first scientific journals implemented peer review, and up to this moment, it has been an integral part of scientific communication that guides editors in the decision-making process on submitted manuscripts. Peer-review refers to the evaluation of a manuscript by an author's peers. In health care research, doctors and/or scientists in the same area of research, clinical specialization, or sub-specialization provide a critical, independent, and unbiased assessment of the submitted manuscripts. It requires experts with relevant expertise and willingness to perform impartial reviews. A study by Hamilton et al. [02] on journal editors reported that finding peer reviewers

was one of the most challenging jobs for an editor. A task projected to become more difficult in the future [03], a common view shared by the editors of The Saudi Medical Journal for Students (SMJS).

Universities across Saudi Arabia are witnessing a dramatic increase in the number of scientific research papers and innovations [04]. Journals like SMJS are experiencing a significant rise in manuscript submissions that will require a large number of competent peer-reviewers with the needed expertise, training, and experience. One way to achieve this is by promoting "co-reviewing." Co-reviewing means when the Invited Reviewers perform manuscript peer-reviewing with the assistance of another reviewer [01]. It is a well-known practice, and Journals are aware of this practice. The Co-reviewer can be compared to a coauthor of a manuscript when

one is not the corresponding author. Usually, most co-reviewers are Early Career Researchers (ECRs) who find this experience beneficial.

The author (LHA) gained experience while managing the Peer-Review Process of SMJS for three years. Based on her three years of experience as a student editor at SMJS, she believes that involving undergraduate students in the peer-review process as recognized co-reviewers is a valid argument that requires serious consideration, albeit that it should be under some form of supervision or guidance. The author (MTR), a Faculty at University of Tabuk, is the founding Editor-in-Chief of SMJS and MET.

This article will discuss the prospect of editors of a Student Medical Journal (SMJ) who are undergraduate medical students as potential co-reviewers.

### **THE SAUDI MEDICAL JOURNAL FOR STUDENTS (SMJS)**

The Saudi Medical Journal for Students (ISSN: 1658-8274 Print; 1658-8282 Electronic), the official journal of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Tabuk [05], is the first SMJ in the Gulf region [06]. It is part of the SMJS-MET publications from the Faculty of Medicine, University of Tabuk. The sister publication of SMJS is MedEdu Tabuk (MET), a newsletter with over 50,000 subscribers. SMJS publishes biannually original (original research papers, review articles and case reports) and non-original (feature/perspective articles, editorials, opinions, and reviews) contributions from health care students (Medicine, Pharmacy, Applied Medical Science, Biological Sciences). The journal was established in

2019 and is recognized by Saudi Commission for Health Specialties (SCFHS) for student publications.

### **EDITORIAL BOARD AT SMJS**

Undergraduate students from health care faculties across Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region are eligible to be on the Editorial Board of SMJS. The Editors manage the publication process, including manuscript submission, communication with authors and reviewers, peer-review process, and publication of accepted manuscripts, thus gaining necessary training in scientific communication and critical appraisal. Manuscripts are peer-reviewed by expert reviewers to ensure high quality [06].

The Student Editorial Board members receive advice from a Faculty Editorial Staff and Advisory committee. A University Advisory Board (UAB), constituting Deans of different health faculties of the University of Tabuk, ensures the quality of SMJS. The Dean of the Faculty of Medicine is the Chairman of the UAB. The Editor-in-Chief is a faculty and, heads the Faculty Advisory Committee, and is a member of the UAB [05, 06].

### **THE SCOPE OF AN EDITOR AT A STUDENT MEDICAL JOURNAL**

In their Editorial, Alaenzi and Raza [06] highlighted the additional challenges an Editor at an SMJ faces from student authors, which include failure to follow proper author guidelines and the submission process, a misunderstanding of Plagiarism and Ethical issues, along with a lack of adequate language and writing skills. In general, there is a lack of knowledge of the Peer-review

process. They support the idea that such journals cannot be characterized as a typical biomedical journals as they struggle to maintain a delicate balance between being "Student-friendly" and "a reliable peer-reviewed journal" [06, 07].

An SMJS editor, like any Peer-Review Journal Editor, must understand the peer-review process and familiarize themselves with the roles and responsibilities of an editor. They process manuscripts, check guidelines and differentiate a good quality manuscript from a poor one. Editorial board members must also be able to identify articles that fall within the scope of their journals and be attractive to their readers.

### **MENTORING REVIEWERS AND CO-REVIEWING**

Ph.D. candidates, young professionals, and other Early care researchers are more likely to accept and perform a review on time [08, 09]. The main concern is their expertise. However, when aided by a mentor, they typically provide high-quality reviews. The ECRs are more receptive to training and feedback. The training programs for the new reviewers also have had mixed success. An extensive and prolonged mentoring program of pairing new reviewers with more experienced senior reviewers to improve the quality of peer-reviewing by Houry, Green, and Callaham [10] did not result in higher review scores. The method of providing training programs and pairing new reviewers with mentors for a certain period will not improve peer-review skills. Continuous careful practice of monitoring peer reviewing is more likely to improve the review skills of new reviewers.

The Saudi Medical Journal for Students believes that being a member of the editorial board of an SMJ provides an excellent opportunity for undergraduate students to improve their cognitive skills. The practice of permanently pairing editors as co-reviewers with established reviewers will gradually enhance their review skills. Recognizing them as co-reviewers will act as a motivation for the reviewers in their work.

We need to highlight more on the student's peer review in students' medical journals and show the significant change achievable behind it, especially the early exposure and participation of undergraduate medical students that will improve their knowledge in different subjects and more in their interest, skills mainly in the reading and writing resulting from exposing them to a wide variety of written articles, critical thinking and the integration of training workshops' will make them more motivated to participate in research work and well prepared to perform a scholarly work [11,12]

Medical Students have always occupied a large portion of science development and made a significant change in research and medicine [13]. The emerging situation of review overload is not likely to change. Continuous mentoring of students in peer review and acknowledging their work as co-reviewing will help create a good number of reviewers for the future.

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