



EDITORIAL

Accuracy

Peer reviewed journals contain papers involving research, review, and sometimes theory, with the objective of adding to the knowledge base of the professions they serve. The peer-review system is designed to prevent biased articles from appearing, as well as aiming to filter out inaccurate citations and quotations.

The review process is made up of different layers, each designed to contribute toward ensuring an accurate content. The primary responsibility lies with the author(s), whose absolute duty it is to verify the accuracy of the statements they make, as well as the supporting citations and quotations they offer. Subsequent layers of checking rely on the efforts of the journal editor and the referees, the people chosen because of their familiarity with the topic, who review the paper and provide feedback to the author(s) as to the relevance and accuracy of the content. The reviewer's and editor's suggestions, advice and corrections are then passed back to the author(s) to revise accordingly, before an editorial decision is made as to whether to publish or not.

A final filter occurs at the proof stage, when errors are again looked for, and corrected, by the typesetters, the author(s) and the editor.

The end-result of all these separate efforts should be a credible addition to the knowledge base of the profession(s) served by the journal in question. Unfortunately this end-result is not always achieved.

A recent review of referencing and quotation accuracy was published in JBMT's sister publication, *Manual Therapy* (Gosling et al., 2004). This looked at the relative number of factual errors contained in citations in different manual therapy journals. The results were unsatisfactory, with all the journals surveyed falling short of an adequate standard, and with JBMT emerging as having a higher level of errors than others, in many particulars.

Many such errors are of relatively minor importance, consisting of such problems as incorrect author initials, or wrong journal/book page number, for example. Such errors might sometimes delay location of the original source, but are unlikely to prevent a reader or researcher from delving into the primary source material.

Mistakes of a larger degree might include provision of an incorrect journal title, or the name of one of an article's authors. This could conceivably prevent the sourcing of original material, although with modern databases, most sources should be traceable, even if details are partially inaccurate.

The worst scenario involves misinformation and inaccuracy of quotation, for example when support for a particular statement or concept is claimed using a reference which is frankly invalid. This can happen in error, when an original source has been misunderstood by the author(s), or it can be deliberate, designed to confuse or confound readers.

Such major errors should never find their way into print, but sometimes do, because the entire review process depends on all of its stages being conducted with attention to detail. Unfortunately even the very best peer review journals seldom achieve 100% accuracy. The recent survey, referred to above, found that a great deal more needs to be done to bring manual therapy journals to an acceptable level.

Additional filters exist that would help to eliminate the possibility of typing errors (misspelled names, incorrect page numbers for example). For example computer programmes such as *End-Note*, could be used to improve modern review systems.

However, basically what is required is greater diligence on the part of all those involved in the traditional review process.

Errors start with the author(s), and this is where the most effort is required. Author(s) must check, and double check, citations, both before submission, and again at proof stage. And reviewers of prospective Journal papers must pay more attention to citation (and quotation) quality, accuracy and relevance.

The Editorial team at JBMT are grateful to the authors of this critical paper, as it will help to generate efforts on all our parts, so that the reliability and accuracy of articles, and their citations, can be enhanced.

Reference

Gosling, C.M., Cameron, M., Gibbons, P., 2004. Referencing and quotation accuracy in four manual therapy journals. *Manual Therapy* 9, 36-40.

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