



EDITORIAL

Accuracy: a new initiative

In July 2004 JBMTs Editorial reported on and discussed the paper by Gosling et al. (2004) that reported on a general tendency for papers appearing in peer-reviewed, manual therapy journals, to contain a higher level of errors and inaccuracies than is acceptable.

Errors were reported such as citations giving incorrect author initials (and sometimes names), as well as dates, page numbers and—rarely—incorrect original journal sources.

Inaccuracies were also apparent in some papers involving the irrelevant, or biased, use of citations and/or quotations to support article author's statements or positions.

Readers deserve to be able to trust what they read in peer-reviewed journals, not least because their clinical work is likely to be influenced by findings, studies, reports, surveys and statements.

The material appearing in peer-reviewed journals needs to be credible, and when errors are compounded by inaccuracies, credibility is strained.

These problems seemed to be endemic, across the board, with even the most prestigious medical journals guilty at times.

However, based on the findings of Gosling et al., there seem to be a higher level of these unacceptable occurrences in manual therapy journals such as JBMT.

The Editorial, last July, detailed the layers of filtration built into the peer-review process, designed to ensure that the accuracy of citations and quotations is assured.

Most responsibility of course falls on the author(s), to follow the principles of accuracy, appropriateness and non-biased use of the available literature to illustrate and support their work.

Reviewers (blinded to the identity of the author(s)), along with the editor, provide the next layer of scrutiny, and a good many errors and inaccuracies are picked up at this stage. Then, at the type-setting stage, a further layer of screening occurs, before a

final stage is reached where both the editor and the author(s) see proofs and correct these, as well as dealing with queries raised by the typesetters.

And yet, despite these processes, mistakes (too frequently) and frank distortions (rarely), still get through the system.

JBMTs new Associate Editor, John Hannon DC, has devised a further, innovative, and we believe excellent layer to the peer-review process that will be introduced to JBMTs peer-review process within the next few months.

University and College department-heads and professors are being contacted to help JBMT to recruit a team of 'citation checkers' to each handle a limited number of submitted papers each year.

A selection of recommended volunteer students, training in one of the branches of manual medicine, will be signed up to act to perform specific tasks, including matching citations to computer databases (such as PubMed) for accuracy of names, publication details, dates, etc.

Any citations that are not found on normal databases will be identified and attempts made to obtain hard-copies of these to establish accuracy.

Checkers will also match citations to JBMTs house-style, however, their most important task will be to critically evaluate quotations and references for accuracy and relevance, and to alert the editor if discrepancies are found.

The citation checking process will commence at the same time that review process commences, so that feedback to the author(s) can be simultaneous. When complete, two peer-reviews, along with the checker results, will be forwarded to authors so that revision can be carried out in the normal manner.

In this way it is hoped that inaccurate, poorly formulated, and inappropriate citations will be more efficiently identified and weeded out.

In addition to a subscription to JBMT, as a reward for their efforts, the process will be an excellent

additional training for the students involved, offering real-life exposure to critical evaluation of the literature.

The process will clearly benefit JBMT's readers as well, and will go a long way toward ensuring that any future surveys of accuracy place JBMT near the top of the list, rather than too low for comfort.

Any department heads interested in participating in this important project should contact John Hannon DC at "John Hannon" jhannon@digitalputty.com, or to the editor at leon@bodymove.demon.co.uk.

Reference

Gosling, C., Cameron, M., Gibbons, P., 2004. Referencing and quotation accuracy in Four Manual Therapy Journals. *Manual Therapy* 9 (1), 36–40.

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