Reviewers of the year 2019

Dan Spratt  
Jake Patterson  
Stephen Williams

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Dan Spratt

As a reviewer, what is the best advice you could give to an author who is about to submit a manuscript?

Take the time to think about what question or knowledge gap you are answering. Ask yourself if the data set you are using can actually answer the question. Often if findings are positive they get submitted, but is this data set robust enough that if the results were negative you would trust these findings as well? Just because a p-value is significant doesn’t mean the finding is true. Be critical of your own work and identify sources of bias and confounding upfront, and if they can’t be sufficiently removed find a new data set to answer your question. Make sure to tell a story from Introduction all the way through the end of the Discussion. One of, if not the most, important section is the Methods section. Be thorough and transparent. Make sure you use a formal biostatistician, and take the time to understand the strengths/weaknesses of various statistical approaches. Take the time to read the literature to understand what else has been done on the topic. Your project may have already been done 10-20 years ago. Remember that the goal of research is ultimately to help patients and/or society. If the utility of the research to help patients (even in the distant future) is not apparent, the impact of the work drops substantially.

What was the most exceptional article published in the field of urology this year and why?

The Finnish Randomized Trial of observation vs adjuvant radiotherapy. This was a well done randomized trial that transparently reported the trial methods and results. The tone of the paper was very balanced. This trial added new information to the benefit and harms of adjuvant radiotherapy in the most contemporary RCT on this topic to date. Statistical analyses were well done and clearly presented.

Jake Patterson

From the point of view of a reviewer, what is something that can “make or break” a paper’s success?

Being a reviewer is a constant privilege and honour, especially for journals of the calibre of European Urology. Reviewing is easy when papers have the perfect blend of readability, interest and quality scientific content, but this is not always the case! Poor choices of references, especially when chosen solely to support questionable conclusions, makes approval for publication less likely. Another concern is when numbers are small or power calculations are dubious or absent, yet strong conclusions are drawn making sweeping recommendations for changes in practice. Finally, extensive unnecessary text adding nothing to content just serves to infuriate the reviewer!

How has Social Media affected scientific publishing in the last few years?

Social media has changed the face of the medical literature, and also the nature of communication of progress. Journals have embraced a quicker turnaround time, as well as other changes such as visual abstracts, priority publication, and online content sharing to respond to the needs of the readership. This means that journals with an effective online presence can rapidly showcase both cutting edge science and the best of contemporary clinical practice. Social media has also changed interaction with scientific meetings, with participation from “virtual attendees”, offering journals the chance to interact with readers even before publication of what’s coming next.

Stephen Williams

How has reviewing for European Urology changed how you write?

Reviewing for European Urology has been an honor as this is the urology journal with the highest impact factor. That being said, the quality and rigor set forth by submitting authors is unprecedented. Moreover, the guidelines provided by the board including statistical methodology lead the field but also provide a standard framework so all authors can improve and compare their craft. I have learned tremendously from the high caliber of submissions in how to improve my own research program and overall manuscript submissions.

What advice can you give to young authors who would like to become useful reviewers?

Take advantage of this opportunity to improve your writing skills but overall research methodology. The high quality of EU submissions and opportunity to review will allow you to be a better investigator. This is the best urology journal in the world and I would highly recommend any young (or older) author to review for this journal. Be a part of the change and lead with the best in the game!