



EDITORIAL

Is it time for open peer-review?

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In the last editorials I have explained the need to improve the quality of the editorial process of our journal,¹ and the changes that will be implemented in 2017.² However, there is another aspect that must be addressed: peer-review.

In general terms, the peer-review process in our journal follows a series of stages. Once a manuscript is received, it is immediately reviewed to check whether it complies with the minimum quality and relevance standards of our journal, and with the *Instructions to the authors*. When the manuscript does not meet those requirements, it is sent back to the authors for correction or rejected if its quality is noticeably poor.

When the manuscript has been accepted, appropriate reviewers are selected taking into account their expertise in the topic. Reviewers of a specific manuscript are experienced researchers with Scopus publications in the field. Usually five reviewers are selected and invited to participate.

They receive an email containing the invitation, the summary of the manuscript and the deadline for submitting their review. On average two or three reviewers agree to evaluate a manuscript and submit their comments within 10 days. A relevant aspect is that the peer-review process is double-blind, that is, reviewers do not know the name of the authors and authors do not know who will review their manuscript. Double-blind peer-review has become the most commonly used method by scientific journals.

Despite its advantages, the peer-review system has been widely criticized because it is not efficient and seems to be considerably less effective.³ Double-blind peer-review has also been criticized for being an “obscure” system, as it lacks the transparency necessary for the development of science. For example, if a reviewer has a conflict with the author of a manuscript, the reviewer may make

a negative assessment of the manuscript just for revenge. In other cases, some authors create alter egos that they conveniently suggest as reviewers of their manuscripts, always obtaining positive reviews. There is also the possibility that the reviewer performs a poor review process, since anonymity will protect his/her identity from any criticism or sanction. However, we must remember that the objective of double blind peer-review originates precisely with the intention of avoiding conflicts of interest and only considering the quality of the manuscript.

However, there are other options. To overcome the weaknesses of double-blind peer-review, open peer-review has been proposed.

In this system, reviewers know the names of the authors and authors know who the reviewers will be. Then, reviewers' comments are published along with the accepted manuscripts. This makes the peer-review process exceptionally transparent, as it allows a simultaneous evaluation of the work of the reviewers. The effects of this transparency appear to be positive in many ways. For example, readers can observe how peer-review was performed and how the manuscript improved during that process.

As authors know their reviewers, comments to their manuscript may be perceived as more constructive suggestions. In addition, reviewers may feel more motivated to make a better evaluation of the manuscript, as evidence of the quality of their work will remain visible in the published article. Reviewers could now see their effort recognized, as there remains a testimony (usually free access) of the review they have performed.

But open peer-review also has some limitations. As stated above, double-blind peer-review is the method most commonly used by scientific journals, and reviewers are accustomed to anonymity.

Given the above, it is likely that many reviewers will



avoid reviewing if their names and comments are publicly exposed. This poses a problem for the work of journals, since without reviewers a peer-reviewed journal cannot exist.

Thinking about the improvements of our processes for the year 2017, the question that arises is: Are we prepared

to implement an open peer-review process in the *Journal of Oral Research*?

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