



Letters to the Editor AMJ 2012, 5, 2

Comments on editorial 'Don't ask, don't tell – who should promote body donation programmes in the public domain?'

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Dear Editor,

I read with interest the editorial article¹ 'Don't ask, don't tell – who should promote body donation programmes in the public domain?' published in your esteemed *Australasian Medical Journal* and written by Jon Cornwall of Otago University, New Zealand. The author has emphasised awareness about body donation among the scientific community. In medical training, dissection has been labelled as the 'royal road' and the cadaver as the 'first patient'.² The gross anatomical dissection is a time-honoured part of medical education. Regarded as an integral component of the medical curriculum, a sound knowledge of human anatomy prepares the medical student for his or her future training at clinical level.²

In India, with the mushrooming of medical institutions, there is an ever-increasing demand for cadavers for anatomy dissection.³ The Anatomy Act was enacted in India in 1949, and has been adopted in different states of the Republic of India. This act provides for collection of a dead body for teaching purposes, only if death occurs in a state hospital or in a public place within the prescribed zone of a medical school, provided the police have declared a lapse of 48 hours, there are no claimants for the body and that it could be used for medical purposes.⁴ The Indian Delhi Anatomy Act also provides the procedure for the disposal of unclaimed bodies in hospitals, prisons and public places. The Punjab Act provides to take possession of unclaimed dead bodies in hospitals, prisons, public places for the aforesaid purposes. Occasionally cadavers are donated by relatives of the deceased to teaching institutions according to the dead person's wishes.³

However there are certain difficulties in the procurement of cadavers. This is because of the emergence of nearly 100 new medical schools within the last 10 years. Unlike in the United States, where there is a successful body donation programme, many medical colleges in the world face difficulties in obtaining enough cadavers for teaching human anatomy.²

The terms 'body donation', 'anatomical donation' or 'body bequest' are commonly used. Body donation is defined as the act of giving one's body after death for medical research and education.³ Thus a person can give something back to society and give students the chance to learn something that can influence generations to come. Body donation is regulated by various acts according to each country and is considered to be one of the modern expressions of solidarity.³

I agree with Cornwall¹ that, given the challenge of maintaining donation numbers at teaching institutions, it is important that the existence of body donation camps be promoted in some form in the public eye. I suggest that the dean/associate dean of the institution or head of the department of anatomy of each medical school should look into this matter and conduct the body donation programme at least once a year. The public should know the importance of learning human anatomy and learn awareness about donating their body to help doctors. The government of each country should take the initiative and make the public aware of this situation.

In view of this scenario, I believe that the article 'Don't ask, don't tell – who should promote body donation programmes in the public domain?' is worthy reading for health science educators, researchers and academics.

I congratulate the author for their excellent work in providing this literature. Also I thank the editorial board of the AMJ for publishing this editorial which will be enlightening to all of us.

Sincerely,

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References

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Reviewing the review process: An important area of research

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Dear Editor,

I read with great interest the recent study published in the AMJ titled 'Reviewing the review process: Identifying sources of delay'.¹ The issue of timely publication of high quality manuscripts has been an area of great personal interest to me and I believe to all those involved in research. I consider myself lucky to have been both an author and a reviewer of manuscripts. Working in a developing country like Nepal ensures both opportunities and challenges with regard to research and scientific publication.

Online submission of manuscripts has been a major positive development as far as we (I and authors in developing nations) are concerned. In Nepal the postal system is slow and sometimes unreliable. Online submission has minimised the costs involved and made the process simpler. The only problem may be that slow internet speeds can make the online submission process difficult and time consuming in many developing nations.

I am in concurrence with the author that journal editors have to ensure a fine balancing act between maintaining quality and ensuring quick and timely publication. I am aware that reviewers are stretched thin by a variety of commitments. The very nature of the review process identifies 'achieving'

individuals who are experts in their fields. These individuals by the sheer nature of their achievements are likely to be burdened with a number of other responsibilities. I personally regard being called upon to review a manuscript as a sign of recognition. Like the author I am fully in favour of reviewers committing to a specified time frame to complete the review. But due to a variety of demands on time this may not always be possible. Luckily until now I have been able to fulfil my review commitments on time.

As an author I have frequently encountered what the author of the study terms as 'poor agreement between reviewers'. Often one reviewer has stated the study to be excellent and recommended publication as soon as possible while another reviewer has recommended rejection! Despite the efforts of journals to provide objective guidelines the review process is basically subjective where the reviewer evaluates a manuscript based on the reviewer's expertise and personal knowledge of the subject. I accept that often authors may be slow in responding to requested revisions due to various reasons. This could also be an important source for delay.

Having been both an author and a reviewer I appreciate that often manuscripts are poorly formatted. A possible reason I think is that many authors are not aware of the importance of formatting their manuscripts strictly in accordance with the instructions to authors. Instructions are often not followed especially with regard to citing references in the text and quoting them in the reference section. I have to remind my colleagues and students of the importance of citing references in the required format periodically. Not citing references in the required format can lead to unnecessary delays in the review process as the manuscript is often returned to the authors to correct the references and the ensuing delay can cause frustration and other problems.

I agree that often the quality of written English in the manuscripts is poor. The suggested requirement for mandatory assistance from an English language expert may create problems for authors from developing countries. Many journals from developed nations are more comfortable with a native English speaker copyediting the manuscript. There are many English language teachers in the developing world with acceptable language skills. Authors from developing nations do not have the resources to pay the high fees of professional copyediting services, therefore I am worried by the possibility that this requirement may serve as a



probable barrier to publication for authors from developing nations. However, minimum standards of English do need to be adhered to as improper use of language makes the manuscript difficult to read, results in a poor flow of ideas, and can result in miscommunication or improper communication of the authors' ideas.

I second the author's proposition that where possible having a single round of review can considerably shorten the publication process. I am in favour of regular communication among all the parties involved as stressed by the author. Personally I have often suffered from lack of communication on the part of journals. I once again convey my appreciation to the AMJ for highlighting this very important area and for the journal's commitment to ensuring timely publication without sacrificing quality and merit.

Sincerely,

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Reference

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Author's reply:

I thank the authors of this letter for their supportive comments. I note that with an acceptance rate of close to 50% (in terms of papers submitted for peer review), the AMJ is committed to publishing a variety of papers ranging from research through to discussion and opinion pieces, and is also keen to receive papers from new experts including students. This, however, does not mean that the AMJ will accept papers with poor science, papers failing to make a contribution to a particular field of study, papers lacking ethical or other approvals, or poorly formatted papers. The journal is more supportive than most and has a process for guiding authors to improve the quality of submissions.