EDITORIAL

Reporting Your Research – Our Responsibility

“The greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance, it is the illusion of knowledge.”
Boorstin (1983)

Henry Oldenburg, the first secretary of the Royal Society of London, is credited with initiating the concept of publication (in the society’s ‘Philosophical Transactions’), and of sending submitted manuscripts to experts to judge their quality. It was a form of reward – it was not he who discovered something first, but he who published first that would gain recognition by peers. Those fundamental steps were the beginnings of the scientific journal and the practice of peer review that we still hold dear today. It is a system and a process that depends to a great extent on trust, and recognising our individual and collective roles and responsibilities.

Relatively few of us will have the good fortune to complete a piece of research considered significant enough to be published in a journal with a stellar impact factor and a century (or more) of history. But many of us regularly produce work of sound quality and of sufficient value and relevance which others would benefit from knowing. Yet we do not transfer those findings into manuscripts, and offer them for publication. There may be a litany of reasons for this: fear of the unknown if you have not run the gauntlet of the writing and submission process before; lack of confidence in the relevance of your work and findings; or ‘lack’ of time. But these are mere excuses. We must remember - reporting of our work is a social and professional responsibility of any researcher, and we must not shirk - or shrink from - that responsibility. Until findings have been written, submitted, vetted, and published in a form accessible for all, then ‘our job’ has not been done.

Other people in the sequence of activities leading to publication of research have responsibilities also. Proportionally, the number of researchers is smaller in the developing world compared to the developed world. So too are the publication opportunities. One of our goals is, therefore, to encourage publication of work from the developing world as well as from the developed world - but we do not accept all that comes through the ‘e-mail box’. As Editors of a scientific journal - celebrating our first anniversary - it is our responsibility to ensure the quality of the process. Not only the logistics, the format, and the structure, but also the peer review.

The journal Science recently published a revealing article of a ‘sting’ designed, implemented, and reported by them. In brief, they artfully concocted a “credible but mundane scientific paper” but with “such grave errors that a competent peer reviewer should easily identify it as flawed and unpublishable”. Between January and August 2013 the same paper was submitted to 304 open access publications. Distressingly, at the time of publication of the Science article, of the 304 open access journals 157 had actually accepted the flawed paper and only 98 had rejected it. Worse, just 106 appeared to have performed any type of discernible review, and of those journals nearly 70% had ultimately accepted the paper (and in 16 cases, despite damning reviews, the Editors still accepted the paper). Bohannon’s analysis showed an interesting global distribution of open-access publishers, editors, and bank accounts! The implication from the Science article is that ‘open access’ journals have become big business, with more concern for publication fees than for the quality of the submitted papers and the process of peer review.

The article did not denigrate the ‘open access’ route of publication, but indeed supported it while questioning how best to achieve it. Open access is to be encouraged. Like many things involving humans, and very familiar to those of us active in eHealth, it is not the ‘technology’ that is at fault but our application of it.

So what is the process for JISfTeH? Every paper that is submitted through the Journal’s website
receives preliminary review through one or more of the Journal’s senior editors. Although we go further, even this step is ‘peer’ review. Unlike some journals where editorial decisions may be made by ‘professional’ editors, each of the senior editors of JISfTeH is actively engaged in independent, high level research in eHealth, and regularly peer review for other journals. They are aware of and understand the field, and have editorial experience. In addition our Editorial Board, who may contribute to subsequent peer review and who guide and support the judgement made by senior editors, were deliberately selected to provide a mix of internationally recognised, geographically dispersed, and knowledgeable experts who can be relied upon.

There is no publication fee, and all of the editors and other peer reviewers offer their time and talent as a contribution to their profession. It is in this way that we are able to achieve a primary goal – to provide free and open access to topical, informative, and sound research that will move the eHealth field forward.

Whilst we wish to see JISfTeH steadily grow and achieve a respectable ‘impact factor’, we are not driven by that sole goal. Therefore our decision to publish a paper will always be based upon the scientific perspective - does it contribute to and benefit the eHealth field - and not what may generate popular debate.

Papers in this edition are varied. Snyders and Van Dyk direct our attention to use of the Business Model Canvas (familiar in the business world, but less so in the eHealth world), and demonstrate its use in modelling business options to achieve a Mobile Health Solution for Vaccination. In doing so they encourage a more ‘business-like’ approach to our collective work in order to achieve sustainability. Sharma provides original research data to support a discussion of the potential for telenursing in India, but identifies there is much groundwork needed before considering telenursing. Lamprinos looks to the use of mHealth to empower diabetics by facilitating self management of their disease.

We hope you will agree that these contributions are topical, informative, and sound, and will move the eHealth field forward. As editors, we thank all of the contributing authors, and our Editorial Board, for their contributions and allowing us to support them through publication in the Journal of the International Society of Telemedicine and eHealth. We look forward to the coming year, and may we remind you to visit our website (www.jisfteh.com) to read current and past issues, and to register and contribute a manuscript of your own. After all – it is our responsibility.

Richard Scott
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References