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Editorial

Editorial

It is probably too late now but a case should have been made to have 2012 declared as the United Nation's International Year of the Reviewer. After all, lesser entities and causes have been recognised in the past: 2008, for example, was the International Year of the Potato!

Some of the characteristics that reviewers must demonstrate have already been recognised: 1965 – cooperation, 1970 – education, 1990 – literacy, 1995 – tolerance, and (one that is most closely aligned) 2001 – volunteers, but it is a serious injustice not to recognise this important group, or the work they do.

Bundled up with reviewers is the whole peer review process which, despite its problems and potential for misuse, seems to be in good health and showing all the signs of continuing demand. It was Winston Churchill who observed that 'democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time' and in a similar way Alfonso¹ argues that the peer review process employed by scientific journals is 'the least bad of the possible systems'.

One interesting aspect of the coverage of the peer review process in the literature is that it is often assumed to have a quite definite start point: when the manuscript is delivered by the editor. In fact, the true role begins well before this in that any serious researcher who is contemplating a piece of research will be considering right from the start what the reviewers will make of the paper that he or she will eventually write. The anticipated feedback will (or should) drive the design of the study or the data collection or analysis. Any cause for thought at this early stage in the work is a testament to reviewers and the review process. This effect may be hard to quantify, but that should not detract from its importance.

One of the most satisfying aspects of being an editor is the chance to interact with reviewers and to see the effort that they bring to their task. Almost without fail there is ample evidence of significant intellectual input into what they do together with an enthusiasm to assist both the journal they serve and the authors who they do not even know (ergo operates a double blind review process). It is an excellent example of altruism, a fact that has already been noted in the literature on the topic.

This journal has been well served by a dedicated group of academics and researchers who have been prepared to put their own work on hold while they assisted others with theirs. It has not always been easy. Some have been called on at short notice; others have been called often, or at least more often than they should have been (although the literature suggests there does not appear to be a 'fatigue effect'). In some cases the effort the reviewers have put in ranks with that put into the original paper.

In keeping with the theme of this piece I would like to acknowledge and thank those listed at the end for their valuable input over the first six issues of this journal. Most are still on the books and I hope that they will find time to continue their valuable work. Others have disappeared (for various and often quite good reasons) and I hope they will know that their input was considered as valuable.

By way of closing, I would like acknowledge the work of the other members of the editorial and production team, Edward Palmer and Peter Murdoch. I will be stepping down from the role of Editor but the journal will continue, based on the efforts of the three groups involved: the production team, the authors, and—mustn't forget—the reviewers.

David Walker, Editor.

Reviewers (2007 – 2011)

S Al-Sarawi	C Habel	N Murray
B Alexander	R Harper	E Palmer
D Birbeck	K-L Harris	K Naidoo
K Burke da Silva	J Hollison	M Picard
M Coulson	I Johnson	C Pope
G Crisp	S Karanicolas	L Rogers
P Devitt	K-L Krause	S Shannon
P Duggan	H Maier	L Westphalen
K Falkner	B McCann	C Willis
N Falkner	J McEntee	J Willison
M Faulkner	U McGowan	M Wilmore
I Green	J Miller	

- 1 Alfonso, F. (2010) The 'Peer-Review' Process in Biomedical Journals: Characteristics of 'Elite' Reviewers. *Neurologia*, 25(9), 521-529.