

## *Article review for publication in “Medicina Paliativa”*

### **Review process and reviewers**

**Peer review** is the process whereby indexed journals are reviewed. The editor responsible for the final decision to accept an article for publication submits said article to two experts in the field who will provide a critical review and a recommendation regarding publication. A final decision is made by the editor once the reviewers have sent in their reports. The editor may reject an article if he or she believes it to be of no interest or minimal requirements for publication are not met, without activating the peer review process. Peer review is key in the editorial process, and a cornerstone in any scientific process. It serves as a filter and also improves research quality. In fact, the quality and honesty of the entire editorial process primarily depends on the quality and honesty of reviewers.

The review process must be **confidential**. Neither the editor nor the reviewers may comment on the article, let alone spread or publish information therein. Other experts may be consulted, but such consultations must be recorded in the review report.

A frequently asked question is: How do I become a journal reviewer? Generally speaking editors select their reviewer, but many journals accept suggestions from authors. A reviewer must be a recognized expert in the field the article deals with. This always implies some subjectivity. Editors generally rely on the potential reviewer's publications, but may also occasionally trust the advice given by a reviewer who is unable to provide a requested review and offers the name of a colleague he or she deems fit for the task. When judging reviewers editors always count on the quality of previous assessments. If the reports by a given reviewer are sound, and also meet time deadlines, he or she will surely be contacted to review further articles on the same topic.

Importantly, reviewers receive no salary or other remuneration for their reviews. It is simply a task that provides prestige. The names of the reviewers who contribute to the journal's content are published at the end of each year or early the following year. At the end of each year Medicina Paliativa will provide reviewers with a participation certificate including the articles that were evaluated. It also improves critical reading skills. All authors should serve as reviewers at least occasionally. It is somehow a duty for those who benefit from the review process of their own publications. However, the key aspect is this strongly enhances education. Secondary benefits are obviously plenty. First those derived from academic education. Secondly, by becoming increasingly recognized by the scientific community (especially in journals dealing with his or her field of

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expertise) an author's originals will more readily access the evaluation process (usually, they will avoid initial rejection by an editor). The author will then be invited to participate as a journal editor, and offered articles for review.

## **Article evaluation report**

Every journal usually has a model report for reviewers. Its structure usually begins with items to be scored using a numeric scale. A free text follows with recommendations for authors and the editor. The former will be sent to authors; the latter are confidential and include a definitive recommendation for or against publication.

Most structural items in a reviewer's report are shared by all journals. **The journal "Medicina Paliativa" requires an assessment of:**

1. **Originality:** Does the article include novel material that is sufficiently interesting to deserve publication? Does it add to current knowledge? Is the research question the article seeks to answer pertinent? Does it fit in the journal's scope?
2. **Structure:** Is the article appropriately laid out into the various sections? Are all sections properly arranged? All sections must be evaluated.
  - A. **Title:** Does it clearly describe the contents? Is it specific?
  - B. **Summary/Abstract:** Does it reflect the contents, highlighting the most relevant facts?
  - C. **Introduction:** Does it clearly reflect what is known on the research topic as well as the existing unknowns? Does it identify the objectives and/or hypotheses of the research? Are objectives/hypotheses clearly stated?
  - D. **Methods:** Do the authors identify their study type and data sources? Is the design appropriate to respond to the posed question? Is the data collection process detailed? Are the study variables and measures described? Is the statistical analysis reported? Do all the involved methods yield results? Might the research be replicated using the described methodology?
  - E. **Results:** Are they clearly expressed in a logical sequence? Do all results correspond to the methods employed? Is the analysis

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appropriate? Are the statistics used appropriate? Should the statistics section be challenging, an expert may be consulted for the assessment. Are the tables and figures understandable on their own? Are all tables and figures necessary? Table results should not be repeated within the text. It is important that no results be interpreted in this section.

- F. **Discussion/Conclusion:** Are claims and discussions based on the research results? Are expectations compared to findings? Are results discussed by comparing them with other relevant research in the field? Do the authors detail their research contributions and future lines of research?
- G. **References:** Are the references included in accordance with the journal's standards?
3. **Language:** Is the article well written? Are the various sections readily understandable? Is the style appropriate? Passing judgement on the English level is the responsibility of the editor, not the reviewer.
4. **Prior research:** Are all relevant references included?
5. **Ethical issues:** If plagiarism or data fraud is suspected, this must be reported to the editor. Does the article comply with all ethical requirements? Was the study protocol approved by the appropriate Ethics Committee? Was informed consent obtained from all subjects?

Overall, the **report for authors** must include an *initial assessment of the article* and a number of *specific remarks*. The general assessment must include a summary sentence, an assessment of the paper's originality and pertinence, and a list of the main strengths and weaknesses. It should be noted that every article is the result of hard work, which should always be praised even when publication is advised against. One should treat each article as one would like his or her own article to be treated. Then detailed remarks must follow discussing the various sections. In addition to pointing out where there is room for improvement, these remarks must suggest potential solutions. Always bear in mind that authors must be allowed to reply to these remarks. No recommendations for acceptance or rejection of the article must be included in the report for authors.

The **report for the editor** must be brief. It must include a recommendation regarding publication: *Rejected* (explain main reasons), *Accepted without revision* or *Accepted with major or minor revision*, depending on the modifications the article requires, which were discussed in the report for authors. This report for the editor must also include any other confidential remarks the authors should not be aware of.

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Reports by a good reviewer must be conscientious and complete. It is crucial that they be submitted in due time (editors usually give 2 to 4 weeks to finish a review). They must provide objective, adequately-supported comments for the authors. Criticism must be constructive. The final recommendation to the editor must be clear.