

# Evaluating, Improving, and Appreciating Peer Review at IJTMB

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Peer review is a mainstay of scientific publishing and, while peer reviewers and scientists report satisfaction with the process, peer review has not been without criticism. Within this editorial, the peer review process at the *IJTMB* is defined and explained. Further, seven steps are identified by the editors as a way to improve efficiency of the peer review and publication process. Those seven steps are: 1) Ask authors to submit possible reviewers; 2) Ask reviewers to update profiles; 3) Ask reviewers to “refer a friend”; 4) Thank reviewers regularly; 5) Ask published authors to review for the Journal; 6) Reduce the length of time to accept peer review invitation; and 7) Reduce requested time to complete peer review. We believe these small requests and changes can have a big effect on the quality of reviews and speed in which manuscripts are published. This manuscript will present instructions for completing peer review profiles. Finally, we more formally recognize and thank peer reviewers from 2018–2020.

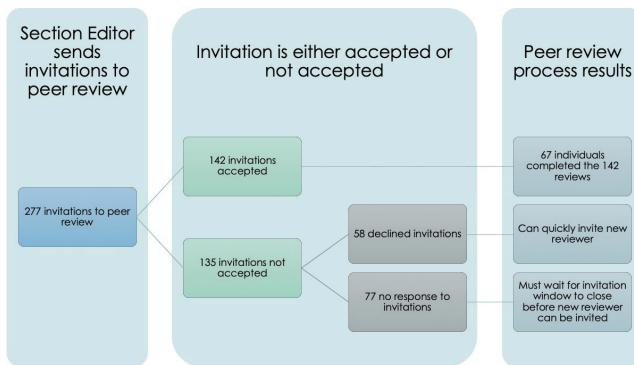
Peer review has been defined as “the process of subjecting an author’s scholarly manuscript to the scrutiny of others who are experts in the same field”.<sup>(1)</sup> The intent of peer review is generally thought to assist journal editors and authors by 1) determining if the paper fits the aims and scope of the journal; 2) evaluating the quality of the approach and methods to proposed research question(s); 3) assessing the validity of findings and resultant conclusions; and 4) improving the quality of the writing and flow of the submitted manuscript.<sup>(1–3)</sup> Yet, the peer review process has been criticized for stifling innovation, missing glaring errors, taking overly long periods to complete, and being subject to bias.<sup>(4,5)</sup> However, when asked, peer reviewers and scientists have expressed satisfaction with the process.<sup>(1,3)</sup> The task of peer

review is nonetheless essential to scientific publishing and to the *IJTMB*. Consequently, this means that, to some extent, the quality of the science published within a journal is influenced by the efforts of the peer reviewer and, generally, peer reviewers are asked to provide this service completely uncompensated.

In 2017, the *IJTMB* published an editorial discussing plans to incentivize the peer review process.<sup>(6)</sup> Since that time, the *IJTMB* has offered three National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork CEs for those who complete a thorough review within the allotted time (generally two to three weeks). With the goal of continuous quality improvement, we offer the following description of the peer review process at this Journal and appreciation of our reviewers.

## IJTMB Peer Review 2018–2020

Once a paper is submitted to the *IJTMB* it begins its quest for publication. The first step is to go through initial editorial review. This review determines if the paper generally fits the aims and scope of the Journal, and if it meets the general writing standards and guidelines set forth in the “information for authors section” of the Journal’s website. If such standards are met, the paper is then assigned to a Section Editor. This Section Editor then begins the process of seeking out peer reviewers for the manuscript. For peer review to be effective, more than one reviewer’s opinion is necessary and generally we seek two to three completed reviews per paper submission. The Section Editor then searches through the peer reviewer database to find individuals with the needed expertise to provide feedback on the manuscript. The chosen reviewer is then sent an email invitation to review the paper and asked to accept or decline the review. If the invitation



**FIGURE 1.** Peer review invitation process and results of peer review process evaluation.

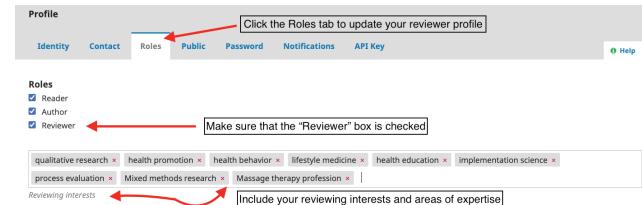
is accepted, the reviewer is asked to complete their submission within a given time frame. The Journal website automatically sends a reminder if the invitation has not been accepted and/or if the accepted review has not been completed.

Between January 2018 and the end of December 2020 we had a total of 66 papers to be reviewed. While most papers (85.9%) go through only one round of peer review, 12% are reviewed twice and 2.1% are reviewed three times. To complete the peer review process (Figure 1), the editors asked for peer reviewers a total of 277 times to evaluate those 66 papers. Of those 277 asks, 142 reviews were submitted and completed by 67 people. When people were invited to review a paper during this timeframe, 51.3% accepted and completed the review and 20.9% declined the offer to review. This means that 27.8% do not respond to the offer to review, creating some significant wait times. With only 67 people reviewing the 66 papers for the Journal, and each paper needing at least two reviewers per paper, this means that generally our reviewers are reviewing multiple times over the course of those two years. On average each reviewer has reviewed two papers ( $SD\ 1.54$ ) with several individuals reviewing four or more papers.

## Improving Peer Review and Publication Process

With the goal of improving the publication process, the *IJTM*B editors met in late 2020 to determine possible avenues to reduce the time it takes for peer review. The following seven items have been identified as steps to take that may assist in this process.

1. Ask authors to submit possible reviewers—We request that authors submit a list of three to five individuals with the requisite expertise to review their manuscript. These individuals should not be a member of the author's research team or come from within the same department as the author(s).
2. Ask reviewers to update profiles—Incomplete and/or lack of details of peer review experience within reviewer profiles has been identified by the section editors as one of the main barriers to selecting peer reviewers. The section editors regularly use the reviewer database to search for individuals to invite to review manuscripts; those without details of their expertise are unlikely to be invited. We request that all of those who are interested in reviewing papers to update their profiles on the *IJTM*B website. See Figure 2 for a screenshot of the website with instructions on areas to complete in your profile.
3. Ask reviewers to “refer a friend”—We request that our current reviewers for the *IJTM*B please invite others to join the process of reviewing papers for the Journal. Consider sending this editorial to colleagues, and highlight the CE incentives for completing timely peer reviews.
4. Thank reviewers regularly—Appreciation is important, and we can't thank our reviewers enough. Each year we will publish the names of those who peer review for the Journal to publicly thank them for their service.
5. Ask published authors to review—We request that, if authors have published with *IJTM*B, they also “return the favor” by lending their expertise back to the Journal in the form of a peer review.
6. Reduce time to accept review invitation—In the past we allowed people two weeks to accept the invitation. That time has been reduced to one week. If a reviewer cannot accept an invitation



**FIGURE 2.** Screenshot of *IJTM*B profile portal with instructions to improve reviewer profiles.

- to peer review, were request that they decline the invitation quickly so we can invite someone else.
7. Reduce time from three weeks to two weeks for completion of the review—We are also asking peer reviewers to complete their review in two weeks rather than the previous three-week time frame.

We are hoping that these steps will help reduce the time for peer review and improve the publication process for our authors. If you are interested in becoming a peer reviewer for *IJTMB* and have not yet completed your profile, please see Figure 2 for instructions.

### **Peer Reviewers 2018–2020**

Finally, we would like to acknowledge and thank all the peer reviewers who provided their expertise, insights, and suggestions for the manuscripts that were submitted to the *IJTMB* in 2018–2020. Those below with an \* next to their name reviewed four or more papers over the 2018–2020 timeframe.

Nityal Kumar Alagingi  
 Derek Richard Austin\*  
 John J. Balletto\*  
 Amanda Baskwill\*  
 Leisa Bellmore  
 Anita Boser  
 MK Brennan  
 Robin Byler Thomas\*  
 Gregory Patrick Casey  
 Joydeep Dutta  
 Chaudhuri  
 Michelle Chaves-Torres  
 Virginia Cowen  
 Tony Davenport  
 Jennifer Dexheimer  
 Robyn Dey  
 Nozomi Donoyama  
 LuAnn Drolc Fortune\*  
 Krisa Fairbanks  
 Leora Fellus

Pam Fitch  
 Sarah Fogarty  
 Lauren Fowler  
 Sandy Fritz  
 Charlene Gaffney  
 Jimmy Gialelis  
 Lauren Gonzales  
 Rob Hemsworth  
 Glenn Hymel  
 Brent Jackson  
 Younes Jahangiri  
 Noudeh  
 Alisa Joy Johnson  
 Arezou Karampourian  
 Ann Blair Kennedy  
 Ronald Kettering  
 Shakil Khan  
 Alex Kidd\*  
 Cherie Kiesler  
 Richard Lebert\*  
 Michelle Liggett

Suzanne Michaud  
 Heather Miller\*  
 Seyedmohammad Mirhosseini  
 Jeff Moggach  
 Albert Moraska\*  
 Christopher Moyer  
 Gopal Nambi  
 P Namiranian  
 Barbara Newell  
 Dennis Newhook  
 Nathan O'Hara  
 Jose M. Orozco\*  
 Giovanni Ottoboni  
 Tricia Pendergrast

Darlene Peters  
 Antony Porcino  
 Stefanie Jo Pusateri  
 Stephen Redmon  
 Grant J. Rich  
 Annika Samuelsen  
 Julie Kathryn Scott  
 Penny Shumaker  
 Jeffery  
 Jeffrey Shuman  
 Shannon Taylor  
 P. Thenmozhi  
 Jacqueline Tibbett  
 Brett Vaughan  
 Ruth Werner

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